

BE AIR FRIENDLY — CHIP, DON'T BURN

By Jennifer Alverson, Bay Area Air Quality Management District

Protect your lungs, your air and your property by using a wood chipper to create a 100-foot defensible space around your home. Disposing of unwanted brush by using a chipping treatment rather than a prescribed burn will spare the air of harmful pollution while protecting your home from wildfires.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District (Air District) recently awarded a grant to Napa Firewise to purchase an industrial-scale wood chipper to dispose of vegetative waste in an environmentally friendly way. As a result, chipping services are being offered free of charge to residents in high fire risk areas throughout Napa County.

Unlike a prescribed burn treatment, chipping creates a useful product. Chipped wood can be used as an enriching soil amendment, as a protective layer against soil erosion, and as biomass fuel in any local cogeneration energy-producing plants. Smaller properties, and those located next to roads, are especially good candidates for using a chipping treatment.

With wood chippers, one need not worry about fire risks, permits or harmful smoke pollution. Agricultural burning, on the other hand, can only be done with proper authorization on select days during the prescribed open-burning season.

If a chipping treatment is not an option, and open burning must take place to dispose of vegetative waste, there are ways to burn more cleanly and efficiently. The Air District's Regulation 5 governs open burning and provides guidelines for burning in a way that minimizes environmental impacts. To find out more about Regulation 5, visit www.baaqmd.gov.

When open burning occurs, the pollutant of chief concern is particulate matter (PM). One cubic yard of chipped vegetation spares the air approximately 1.35 pounds of particulate pollution that would have been emitted had that amount of vegetation been burned.

PM is made up of microscopic particles that can become trapped in one's lungs for years, causing respiratory problems, aggravating asthma, and leading to serious health issues. Chipping unwanted brush instead of burning it is a simpler, safer and healthier way to defend your space and protect the air.

For more information about open burn regulations, visit the Air District Web site at www.baaqmd.gov.