

## **Wildfires scorch California, air quality threatens public health**

By Sheyanne Romero

Visalia Times-Delta, Thursday, Nov 15, 2018

The thousands of acres destroyed by wildfires burning at both ends of the state have choked the San Joaquin Valley with smoke.

Smoke from the Camp Fire will affect Valley air through at least the rest of the week, WeatherAg Chief Meteorologist Scott Borgioli said. A high-pressure system over the eastern Pacific Ocean is causing a generally stagnant air mass over California.

"This dry pattern still looks like it will continue for the next seven to nine days," Borgioli said.

In addition, a Red Flag air warning has been issued for areas affected by the fires and portions of the Central Valley.

Red Flag warnings are issued for weather events that could result in "extreme fire behavior," Cal Fire officials said.

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued an Air Quality Alert for San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare, and Valley portion of Kern counties.

The air quality in the Central Valley is currently listed as "unhealthy." In Tulare County, air quality is "moderate."

The health caution will remain in place and smoke impacts are likely until the fires are under control, San Joaquin Valley officials stated.

The Camp Fire, burning in Butte County, was reported on Wednesday and has since become the deadliest wildfire in California history, burning 113,000 acres — including much of the town of Paradise — and leaving 29 dead. The fire is 25 percent contained with 228 people still unaccounted for in the blaze's path.

In Southern California, the Woolsey and Hill fires have destroyed roughly 90,000 acres, but are nearing containment, according to Cal Fire. Two deaths have been associated with the SoCal fires.

Air quality officials are warning the public of the health risks of breathing in smoke-filled air. Those closer to the fire have been asked to wear face masks.

"Exposure to particle pollution can cause serious health problems, aggravate lung disease, cause asthma attacks and acute bronchitis, and increase risk of respiratory infections," San Joaquin Valley Air District officials warned. "Residents are advised to use caution as conditions warrant."

Older adults and children should avoid prolonged exposure, strenuous activities or heavy exertion, officials added.

To receive up to date information on air quality alerts visit <https://www.valleyair.org>.

## **LUSD limits outdoor activities due to Camp Fire smoke**

By John Bays

Lodi News-Sentinel, Wednesday, Nov 14, 2018

As of Tuesday, Lodi Unified School District is limiting outdoor activity for all students due to smoke in the air from the Camp Fire in Butte County.

"Any activity that would be done outdoors has been moved indoors," school district spokesperson Chelsea Vongehr said on Tuesday afternoon.

The school district receives its air quality information from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, Vongehr said, and updates are available on the school district's website.

"We understand that the air quality is a concern for our staff, parents and students," Scott McGregor, interim assistant superintendent of elementary education said in an email. "As long as (we have) an 'unhealthy' air quality rating for this area, we will limit outdoor activity."

Mike Holst, Tokay High School's athletic director, said on Tuesday that practices for water polo, cross country and soccer were canceled Monday and Tuesday due to the air quality.

"We tried to find indoor spots for them as best as possible, but the air quality was in the unhealthy range so we canceled practice today," Holst said. "It's a bummer because the water polo team has a big game coming up, but you've got to make sure you're keeping the kids' health in mind and limiting their exposure as much as possible."

Ruben Gomez, Tokay High's boys soccer coach, said that Holst sent him a text message instructing him to cancel practice for the day.

"Our first pre-season game is on (Nov.) 26, so it's not going to make a huge difference for us," Gomez said.

Gomez, who also teaches physical education classes at Lakewood Elementary School, said recess was canceled on Tuesday as well.

Robert Winterhalter, athletic director for Lodi High School, said that outdoor soccer and cross country practices were canceled on Monday due to the air quality.

"We've been monitoring the air quality index hourly," Winterhalter said on Tuesday. "Today, we were able to hold practice outside."

Greg Wright, Lodi High School's cross country coach, said the Sac-Joaquin Section championships originally scheduled for last Friday were postponed for a week due to the air quality.

"We're hoping we can get it in this weekend," Wright said. "Plan A is they'll run at Folsom. Plan B is we'll go back to Angels Camp. Plan C is they would have to use subsection results."

Lodi High's cross country team practiced in the school's gym on Monday, Wright said, although they were able to practice outside on Tuesday.

"It's unfortunate, but everyone's in the same position," Wright said on Tuesday. "I talked to the kids today and said people have lost their lives and homes in the fire, so we're pretty fortunate we are where we're at. The kids understand that. At the end of the day, we still have our houses and our loved ones."

The Sac-Joaquin Section on Tuesday announced that Northern California football championships have been rescheduled for Dec. 7 and 8, and the state championships for Dec. 14 and 15.

The section will make an announcement concerning this week's football playoff games by noon today once they receive a more concrete air quality forecast, according to a press release, with games postponed by a week if the air remains in the "unhealthy" range.

Officials will wait longer before deciding what will happen with Saturday's cross country championships, the press release said.

## **Due to bad air from fires, all the activity at Stanislaus schools is inside**

By Deke Farrow

Modesto Bee, Thursday, Nov 15, 2018

Because of smoke from wildfires, public school districts in Stanislaus County are keeping students inside, on what Modesto City Schools calls a rainy day schedule.

"We receive hourly updates from San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and make decisions accordingly," MCS spokeswoman Becky Fortuna told The Bee in an email Thursday morning. "As a result, we have been on a 'rainy day schedule' since Tuesday, meaning all recess and PE occurs indoors."

"We know that many of our families count on us to provide students a safe, supervised environment to go to every day, and we are meeting that responsibility while taking the necessary steps to keep students indoors."

Precautions put into place Thursday in Riverbank Unified schools include moving indoors all PE classes, all elementary school recesses, including lunch, and all after-school activities, Superintendent Daryl Camp said.

Turlock Unified School District also is monitoring air quality hourly, spokeswoman Marie Russell said. "At this time, we plan to keep schools open but to cancel all outdoor activities to ensure the safest situation for our students," she wrote in an email Thursday morning. "If conditions worsen significantly, we will reassess the situation and send updates as appropriate." She noted that the district sent an electronic message to parents Wednesday night, and that families also can stay updated by following TUSD on social media.

The Patterson, Oakdale, Sylvan and Denair districts also confirmed they're on an indoor schedule. The districts' actions are in line with an advisory from the Stanislaus County Health Services Agency on Wednesday. In it, Dr. Julie Vaishampayan, public health officer, said the agency is not recommending school closures or cancellation of normal business activities.

The advisory urges the general public to minimize outdoor activities and stay indoors, with windows and doors closed as much as possible. "Poor wildfire containment and shifting winds can drastically change air quality in a short period of time," the advisory says. "Smoke from wildfires can affect health. The most common symptoms are eye and throat irritation, coughing, and difficulty breathing. Persons with health problems, especially heart or respiratory conditions, should take extra caution."

Air quality in Stanislaus, San Joaquin and Merced counties currently is unhealthy, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Its Real-time Air Advisory Network said fine particulate matter in the air was "very unhealthy" in Modesto on Thursday morning, meaning "everyone should avoid outdoor activity if possible."

But even the highest of its five-level Real-time Outdoor Activity Risk guidelines stop short of calling for school closures. Regarding recess, PE and athletic training and practice, it says all activities should be indoors.

For a second day, though, California State University, Stanislaus, closed its Turlock campus Thursday, as well as its Stockton satellite campus. The university president cited "variable and unpredictable" air quality for possibly many days to come.

In response to a Modesto Bee post on its Facebook page about the Stan State closure, some parents asked why public schools still are making kids attend, and not providing masks. There were suggestions that parents simply keep children home sick if they're concerned.

A Patterson resident wrote, "As long as the schools actually follow the air quality guidelines, kids are safe at school. It would cause distress to working families for the schools to close. Some kids may not have adult supervision, end up home alone, and choose to go skateboarding or for a bike ride. The majority of the school day is (or can be, at least on a short-term basis) indoors. If we start canceling school, we have to make up the days somewhere."