

VALLEY AIR NEWS

New AQI more protective of public health

The Valley Air District has adopted a more health-protective scoring system to provide Valley residents with early warning for upcoming bad air episodes. Each day, the Air District forecasts and publishes an air quality index (AQI) that indicates the severity of air quality conditions in various regions in the Valley. Residents and schools throughout the Valley have utilized the air district's forecast to plan their outdoor activities according to the level of air pollution and their susceptibility to its effects.

The new scoring system, now recommended for nationwide use by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, stems from research that illustrates the negative health effects from ozone exposure occur at lower levels than previously thought. Under the new scoring system, days that previously were classified as "good" air days may now be ranked as "moderate" and some "moderate" days may now be ranked as "unhealthy for sensitive groups".

"While the new scoring system provides a greater safety margin for the public, the

more severe rankings under the new system should not be confused with worsening air quality in the Valley," said Seyed Sadredin, the Air District's executive director and air pollution control officer.

Category	AQI Value	1997	2008
		8 - hour (ppb)	8 - hour (ppb)
Good	0 - 50	0 - 64	0 - 59
Moderate	51 - 100	65 - 84	60 - 75
Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups	101 - 150	85 - 104	76 - 95
Unhealthy	151 - 200	105 - 124	96 - 115
Very Unhealthy	201 - 300	125 - 374	116 - 374
Hazardous	301 - 400	No Change	No Change
	401 - 500	No Change	No Change

The AQI categories - green for "good," yellow for "moderate," orange for "unhealthy for sensitive groups," and red for "unhealthy" -- are not changing, but the calculations used to determine those categories will be different. For example, under the old AQI scale, moderate air quality encompassed daily ozone concentrations between 65 parts per billion (ppb) and 84 ppb. Now, under the new AQI scale, the moderate range signifies lower, cleaner ozone concentrations, between 60 ppb and 75 ppb. Similarly, all categories on the AQI scale will shift to a more stringent, more health-protective calculation.

Despite significant progress in recent years, the Valley continues to face daunting challenges in achieving cleaner air through the Valley.

Ozone, or smog, is a summertime air pollution problem. Ozone season extends from May through September.

PM 2.5 Plan Adopted

On April 30, the Air District's Governing Board adopted a new plan to meet federal clean-air standards for fine particulate matter (PM2.5). The 2008 PM2.5 Plan builds upon previous clean-air plans with additional stringent measures to reach an attainment deadline of 2014 or earlier.

This plan's strategy is to reach attainment for the 1997 PM2.5 standard while making progress towards more stringent standards established by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and California Air Resources Board in 2006.

The plan uses comprehensive measures from the 2007 Ozone Plan that address reducing emissions of nitrogen oxides (NOx), which the EPA has identified as PM2.5 precursors. The plan also includes measures for reducing direct emissions of PM2.5, as well as sulfur dioxide, another precursor to PM2.5.

The District is also strengthening several control strategies from the successful 2003 PM10 Plan, which helped bring the Valley into attainment for PM10 several years before the 2010 deadline. Many of the PM10 plan's measures are already helping to decrease PM2.5 levels.

Incorporating controls from the 2003 PM10 Plan and the 2007 Ozone Plan, combined with additional regulatory measures on directly emitted PM2.5 and SO2, such as more stringent residential wood-burning rules, will allow the air basin to meet the attainment deadline for the 1997 PM2.5 standard on schedule.

Attainment plans for the 2006 PM2.5 standards may be required as early as 2012.

Healthy Air Living Video Contest!

The Air District is seeking amateur and student video producers to create a 30-second video that clearly promotes Healthy Air Living and best answers the question:

"What is a Healthy Air Life?"

The winning video will air on Fresno or Bakersfield TV and be showcased on the Healthy Air Living website!

Videos must be submitted on a DVD or VHS format.

Deadline for submissions is June 13, 2008 at 5pm.

Send submissions to:

SJV Air Pollution Control District
Attn: Outreach and Communications
1990 E. Gettysburg Ave.
Fresno, CA 93726
For more information,
call 559-230-6000.

