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Refrain from vehicle idling as kids head back to school

Pollution from back-to-school traffic could cause a spike in ozone

With school back in session the Valley Air District is asking the public to reduce vehicle emissions by carpooling or walking their children to school and to refrain from vehicle idling during school pick-ups and drop-offs. Triple-digit temperatures and multiple wildfires are impacting Valley air quality, and the public's help is crucial in reducing the risk of spikes in ground-level ozone and exceeding federal air quality standards.

“Thanks to the vigilance and cooperation of residents and businesses throughout the Valley, we’ve had a great summer with regard to keeping ozone levels down,” said Seyed Sadredin, the District’s air pollution control officer and executive director. “We urge the public to be even more mindful of their contributions to poor air quality during this crucial Back-to-School window.”

Valley air quality has shown tremendous improvement over the past several summer ozone seasons compared to many years ago, and has continually set new improvement records over the past 35 years. These improvements would not be possible without the success of the District’s control strategy through its various attainment planning efforts, its robust incentive programs, and the commitment from Valley stakeholders doing their part to reduce emissions as much as possible.

To ensure that these clean air trends continue during the Back-to-School season, the Valley Air District may call for the public to take action when conditions such as increased emissions, high temperatures and stagnant air flow are favorable for ozone accumulation. Residents and businesses are urged to reduce vehicle emissions by driving less, refraining from idling their vehicles, carpooling or vanpooling and avoiding the use of drive-through services. Other measures, such as shifting ozone-creating activities, including lawn maintenance to early mornings, can also help offset rising ozone levels.

To help minimize pollution associated with school site vehicle idling, the District has partnered with hundreds of Valley schools through the Healthy Air Living Schools program. The program gives schools tools and materials to encourage parents to “Turn the Key & Be Idle Free” when picking up or dropping off students.

In addition, the program trains schools on how to use the Real-time Air Advisory Network (RAAN) and Real-time Outdoor Activity Risk (ROAR) Guidelines. Schools, parents or any Valley resident can check current, localized air quality by subscribing to RAAN, which links a computer or iPhone app to any air monitoring station in the District’s Valley-wide network. Hourly, automated emails are delivered when air quality is changing.

To explore these tools, visit www.valleyair.org/RAAN or www.valleyair.org/WAAQS. Residents can also check their daily air quality forecast by calling 1-800 SMOG INFO (766-4463). Plus, visit the District on Facebook or Twitter by searching “Valley Air District.”