

For immediate release 06/15/17

Attn: Local news, weather, health and assignment editors

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Walnut wood chip fire in Tulare County prompts health caution

Smoke from the walnut wood chip fire near Porterville is affecting air quality in Tulare County and has the potential to impact the Eastern half of the Valley air basin portion of Kern County. Beginning Friday 6/16/17, a strong high pressure pattern will build over the region with triple digit temperatures forecast through the weekend and into next week. The health caution will remain in place and smoke impacts are likely, until the fire is extinguished.

Currently, the City of Porterville, Visalia and neighboring communities are experiencing smoke impacts. The hot, stagnant conditions will have the potential for new fires to occur across the Valley. The Tulare County Fire Department determined that the walnut chip fire was caused by spontaneous combustion.

Smoke from fires produces particulate matter (PM2.5), which can cause serious health problems including lung disease, asthma attacks and increased risk of heart attacks and stroke. People with existing respiratory conditions, young children and elderly people are especially susceptible to health effects from these pollutants. Air District officials urge residents to follow their doctors' orders when exposed to PM 2.5 and stay indoors if at all possible.

Please be advised that the District's Real-time Air Advisory Network (RAAN) monitors are designed to detect the fine particulates (called PM2.5 which are microscopic in size and not visible to the human eye) that exist in smoke. Ash particles are much larger in size and will not be detected by our monitors. Therefore an area may be experiencing ash impacts from potential fires while the PM monitor reflects a moderate reading. If you can smell smoke or see ash that is an indication that you should be treating air quality conditions as "Unhealthy" (RAAN Level 4 or higher) and remain indoors.

Residents can check the nearest RAAN monitor to their location to determine localized air-quality conditions at www.valleyair.org/RAAN. For more information, visit www.valleyair.org or call a District office in Fresno (559-230-6000), Modesto (209-557-6400) or Bakersfield (661-392-5500).