

Valley air still pushing limits

Modesto Bee, Thursday, Sept. 8, 2011

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution District said the valley air basin continues to be on an Air Alert through today.

This includes the counties of Merced, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and portions of Kern.

High temperature, ozone buildup and a lack of atmospheric mixing have brought about a high risk for possibly exceeding pollution limits through today.

The Valley Air District urges all valley residents to take action to reduce their emissions.

Limiting vehicle use is an important way to cut emissions.

Area residents, business asked to reduce emissions

Merced Sun-Star and the Modesto Bee, Thursday, Sept. 8, 2011

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Pollution levels spiked Tuesday at 119 parts per billion in the Fresno area. A reading of 125 ppb is considered a violation of the federal one-hour ozone standard. High temperature, ozone buildup and lack of atmospheric mixing have brought about a high risk for exceeding the standard. The Valley Air District urges all Valley residents to take action to reduce their emissions during this critical time.

Air alerts are called when conditions may lead to ozone formation that results in exceeding health-based ozone standards. There are steps residents and businesses can take to prevent this. Reducing vehicle use is an important way to reduce these emissions.

Residents can reduce smog-forming emissions by:

- Refraining from idling when dropping off/picking up students
- Carpooling, vanpooling or alternate transportation
- Refraining from using drive-through services

Businesses and municipalities can reduce emissions by:

- Shifting operations to early morning or late evening (lawn care)
- Offering flexible work schedules
- Promoting carpools and vanpools for employees
- Implementing telecommuting
- Becoming a healthy air living partner

The District will issue regular updates during this episode.

For more information about air alerts, go to www.valleyair.org/AirAlert/AirAlert_Landing.htm.

Experts: Less Driving, Recession Resulting in Better Valley Air

By George Lurie, staff writer

The Valley Voice, Thursday, September 8, 2011

Tulare County - For area residents, there appears to be a silver lining to the so-called Great Recession: During the past year, there has been a marked improvement in the Valley's notoriously poor air quality.

Experts attribute the cleaner air to a number of factors, including favorable weather patterns, fewer trucks roaring up and down Highway 99 and Interstate 5 and, perhaps thanks to \$4-per-gallon gas, less daily driving by local residents. According to officials at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, about 80 percent of the Valley's ozone-forming emissions are produced by vehicle use.

"We are really seeing residents and businesses of the Valley doing their part to reduce ozone formation," said Maricela Velasquez, a spokesperson for the Air District. "We have heard from some people that because of the price of gas, they are not traveling as much. But we are also hearing from people who are telling us that they are using their bicycles more, partly because of gas prices but also because they want to see our air quality improve."

An increasing local trend to keep the car parked more often is translating into a boom in area bicycle sales as well as increased ridership numbers for Visalia Transit, which this year is on pace to break an all-time record for total number of passenger trips.

For years, the Valley's air quality has been among the worst of any metropolitan area in the nation - only the Los Angeles Basin consistently ranks higher. But this summer, Visalia's air quality this year has been so good that on most days, the rolling brown foothills and majestic high Sierras are clearly visible around the city from sunrise to sunset.

"I remember ten years ago when we moved here from the Midwest, the air quality during the summertime was just awful," said Chris Smith, a Chicago native who moved to Visalia in 2002.

"There used to be this dense layer of smog, we called it the 'brown cloud,' that would sit over the Valley every year starting in late May," Smith said. "When we went away for a while and then were driving back home down off of the Grapevine or from Tehachapi or Sequoia Park, it was really noticeable - and disgusting. After the first summer, we almost packed up and moved back east."

This summer, the brown cloud has been replaced by blue skies and, according to Air District officials, the Valley has recorded its cleanest August on record.

This year, the Air District rolled out a new program featuring "Air Alerts," issued by the District when ozone levels threaten to reach 125 parts per billion (ppb).

The season's first Air Alert, from August 23 through August 29, expired without a violation of the 125 ppb standard.

The second Air Alert was issued Labor Day and runs through the end of this week.

Last year, the Valley's air quality exceeded the 125 ppb limit seven times. By comparison, in 1996, according to the Air District, the standard was violated 56 times.

Air Board officials say the 2010 violations - which resulted in \$29 million in federal penalties -- all occurred on days with excessively high temperatures and coincided with added emissions from back-to-school vehicular traffic.

Sayed Sadredin, the Air District's executive director and air pollution control officer, called the response to last month's first Air Alert "overwhelmingly positive and proactive. The efforts of the Valley's population are what will make the difference in avoiding this critical ozone threshold," he added.

Tulare County District 4 Supervisor Steve Worthley, who also sits on the Air District's Board of Directors, said this week he can't remember a summer when the Valley's air quality has been better.

"I guess it's the silver lining in this bad economy but there's no question that the recession has had a positive impact on our air quality," said Worthley. "It is very encouraging that year by year the overall trend keeps improving."

SJ Valley residents urged to spare the air

By The Associated Press

In the San Diego Tribune, Hanford Sentinel, Contra Costa Times & other papers, Wednesday, Sept. 7, 2011

FRESNO, Calif. — Central Valley authorities are asking residents to limit driving to avoid violating federal air pollution laws.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued the air alert after a dangerously high level of ozone recorded in Fresno on Tuesday.

A dangerous combination of hot, stagnant air and car emissions has put the region at risk of a continuing federal fine for violating the Clean Air Act.

The southern Central Valley will remain under the air alert through Thursday.

Ozone levels spiked at 119 ppb in the Fresno area on Tuesday, which means air was unhealthy for everyone not just those with lung and heart problems.

Last year the region became the country's first to be fined by the federal government for an ozone violation.

It's another bad-air day; take it easy

By Eddie Jiminez, staff writer

The Fresno Bee, Thursday, Sept. 8, 2011

Athletes and people with asthma and heart disease should curb outdoor activity today because of poor air quality in Fresno and Kings counties, a Fresno allergist said, as near triple-digit temperatures continue in the Valley.

Dr. A.M. Aminian warns that athletes and physical education students should avoid extended periods of outdoor exertion and that anyone with asthma and heart disease should not take part in outdoor activities.

Air quality today is expected to be unhealthy in Fresno and Kings counties and unhealthy for sensitive groups in Tulare County, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said.

Moderate air quality is forecast for Madera County.

Aminian advises no long-distance running for students and athletes today.

An air alert — called when the area is in danger of exceeding a federal standard for ozone — continues today, the air district said.

Fresno's high is expected to reach 100 degrees today, said the National Weather Service in Hanford.

A high of 99 is forecast for Friday, 97 on Saturday and 95 on Sunday.

Low to mid-90s are the normal highs this time, the weather service said.

Clouds will move into the Valley on Friday night and bring a chance of showers and thunderstorms throughout the weekend, the weather service said. The clouds and moisture could bring increasing humidity.

Overnight lows will be in the mid- to upper 60s.