

Valley air alert gets extended

Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Friday, Sept. 30, 2011

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials extended an air alert through today because of the possibility of high ozone levels.

Officials expect weather conditions to improve today because a cooling trend and better air flow over the region is forecast.

But they remain concerned about higher-than- anticipated ozone levels violating federal air quality limits and stressed the importance of the public's participation in minimizing emissions.

The district is urging the public and business to curtail driving as much as possible during the alert to reduce vehicle emissions, a primary source of ozone.

Last week, the region violated the federal one-hour ozone standard, resulting in a \$29 million fine.

Residents pay for such violations through increased vehicle registration fees.

Cool-down ahead for the valley

By Jill Cowan, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Friday, Sept. 30, 2011

If you feel a change in the weather coming, that's because it is -- in the form of a cool front and rain.

A "winter-type storm" is headed our way, said National Weather Service meteorologist Jim Andersen, and it will likely bring "measurable rain" and snow at higher elevations Tuesday night and Wednesday.

Valley temperatures are expected to dip into the 70s and stay there until at least next Thursday, Andersen said.

A high of 83 is expected for Tuesday, but Wednesday's high is expected to be a "nice and comfortable" 78.

Overnight lows will be in the high 50s.

Andersen said these temperatures will be a bit lower than normal -- averages are usually in the mid-80s this time of year.

The rain, he said, is also about a month ahead of schedule.

"That's the thing," he said. "Normally we don't see rain this early. Usually in the later part of October is when we're starting to see things like this."

But -- aside from a very slight chance of showers Friday afternoon and Saturday evening-- normal, warm and dry weather is expected through the weekend.

Highs in the low to mid-90s are likely for Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Monday's high is expected to be 87.

And at least through Friday the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District predicted continuing bad air quality.

The district extended an Air Alert through Friday, after Clovis saw its second exceedance of the 1-hour ozone standard this year Thursday. South Fresno saw its third exceedance of the standard.

Exceeding the federal 1-hour ozone standard of 125 parts per billion can result in federal monetary penalties, a district news release said.

In Kern county, Friday's air is expected to qualify as "unhealthy for sensitive groups," including young children, the elderly and those with respiratory problems.

The good news is this Air Alert episode -- the fourth this season -- may be the last of the year, the release said.

Though the district does not officially forecast air quality more than a day in advance, "a cool front may lead to lower ozone," said Janelle Schneider, an outreach representative for the air district.

She added that, regardless of the weather, valley residents should "stay mindful of reducing their own emissions whenever possible."

Prescribed burn in Grouse Creek Saturday

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Friday, Sept. 30, 2011

CAL FIRE is conducting an open space Vegetation Management burn beginning at 9 a.m. Saturday in the Grouse Creek drainage.

The burn will be located approximately six miles southwest of Three Rivers and will only be conducted during favorable weather conditions and with approval from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Burn operations should end by 5 p.m.

Approximately 1600 acres of brush and grass oak woodlands are planned for the prescribed burn.

The goal of the burn is to reduce hazardous vegetation and to increase the water table along with improving the wildlife habitat in the drainage. It will also provide protection to Three Rivers and to *the communication infrastructure on top of Blue Ridge*.

Calif. high court OKs cap-and-trade program

The Associated Press

In the Modesto Bee and Stockton Record, Friday, Sept. 30, 2011

SAN FRANCISCO -- California's highest court on Wednesday ruled to allow state air quality regulators to continue working on a contentious program that provides polluters with financial incentives to emit fewer greenhouse gases.

The San Francisco Chronicle reports that the California Supreme Court rejected a request by environmental justice groups to stop the California Air Resources Board, or CARB, from implementing the plan.

The state's so-called "cap and trade" program is a key piece of California's landmark 2006 climate law, called AB32, which seeks to reduce California's release of greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by 2020.

The cap-and-trade program would require polluters like power plants and refineries to buy annual permits for a specified amount of emissions that can be sent into the air. The permits could then be bought and sold by the companies, depending on whether a company exceeds its allotted emissions or falls within them and has extra permits to sell.

Businesses that go over their legally allotted emissions can also meet part of their targets by investing in tree plantings or other greenhouse gas reducing programs anywhere in the world.

The plaintiffs, led by the Center for Race, Poverty and the Environment, argued that the program will simply allow polluters to buy the right to pollute more and further harm the people who live in neighborhoods near dirty facilities.

Work on the program was halted earlier this year when a lower court judge sided with the plaintiffs, saying CARB did not adequately study alternatives to cap and trade in its zeal to adopt the program. But a state court of appeal issued a stay of that ruling, which the high court on Wednesday upheld.

The board applauded the ruling.

"This decision allows us to continue to address the broadest range of approaches to reduce greenhouse gases as required under AB32," said CARB spokesman Stanley Young.

The plaintiffs have vowed to pursue the legal case despite the high court's ruling.

Valley air alert will continue through Friday

By Ezra Romero, staff writer

The Fresno Bee, Thursday, Sept. 29, 2011

High ozone levels in the Valley have prompted an extension of Wednesday's air alert through today.

Although better weather conditions are anticipated for today, the air basin still faces the possibility of exceeding the federal one-hour ozone standard, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said. This week's alert is the fourth of the season.

The Valley saw a second violation of the one-hour ozone standard in Clovis and a third violation in south Fresno this year.

Air alerts are called when conditions could lead to ozone levels that potentially exceed the federal one-hour ozone standard of 125 parts per billion. Multiple violations of the ozone standard can result in financial penalties.

The air alert is in effect for the counties of Fresno, Kings, Tulare, Madera, Merced, Stanislaus and San Joaquin and portions of Kern County.

Air alert called for today

By The Record

Stockton Record, Thursday, Sept. 29, 2011

San Joaquin Valley air cops have called what may be the season's final Air Alert starting today.

Residents are asked to reduce vehicle smog emissions by carpooling, avoiding drive-through services and not idling their cars when they drop off or pick up children at school.

The Air Alert program started this summer to help the Valley comply for the first time with an ozone pollution standard. That standard was violated last week, but officials say there's still a chance to remove a \$29 million penalty — paid for by businesses and all Valley drivers — by 2013, if additional violations can be avoided.