

Blowing dust prompts air alert issued in SJ Valley

The Associated Press

In the Stockton Record, Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Late Wednesday, November 2, 2011

FRESNO, Calif. -- Air alerts are being issued across the San Joaquin Valley as high winds are stirring up dust that can cause health problems in some people. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has issued warnings for Kings, Tulare and the valley portions of Kern counties. The wind is causing large amounts of dust in some areas. Particulate matter of 10 microns and smaller is monitored by the federal government.

In addition, a warning in Fresno County has been issued for even smaller particles of dust. Particulate matter can settle deep in lung tissue and cause long-term problems. The air district is warning older adults and children to avoid exposure and heavy exertion outdoors. The warning is in effect through Wednesday evening.

Blowing dust prompts air quality alert

Taft Midway Driller, Wednesday, Nov. 2, 2011

Taft, Calif. — Strong winds blowing over on the east side of the valley are kicking up dust that is going to affect the Westside.

Even though the winds themselves aren't expected to be a problem in the Taft area, the dust kicked up by strong winds in the Arvin-Lamont and Bakersfield areas is going to degrade air quality to the point where the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution District has declared an air quality alert covering Kings County and the valley portions of Kern and Tulare County

Officials are cautioning people to stay inside if possible or limit physical activity if outside. Strong winds blew down tree branches in Bakersfield, a tree on Weedpatch Highway near Lamont and caused near-zero visibility near Arvin.

Firefighters on the scene of two crashes on Comanche Drive reported brown-out conditions with 30 mile per hour winds blowing dust from plowed fields.

A high-wind-warning is in effect for the extreme southern valley today and a red flag warning is in effect for the Kern County mountains. The winds are coming ahead of a storm system that will bring a chance of rain overnight Thursday into Friday morning and much cooler temperatures. Today's high should be in the upper 70s, followed by an overnight low in the upper 40s tomorrow morning.

Clouds will increase on Thursday with a high in the mid-70s. There is a 30 percent chance of rain after 11 a.m. Winds will increase to 13 to 15 miles per hour with gusts to 20 miles per hour Thursday night.

There will be a 40 percent chance of showers as the cooler weather moves in with a high only reaching the upper 50s.

Friday's overnight low will drop to a chilly 41 degrees and temperatures will stay cool through the weekend.

Wind stirs up dust, trouble in Bakersfield

By Jill Cowan Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Nov 2, 2011

It was a blustery day in Kern County Wednesday, as strong winds blew in from the southeast, bringing with them power outages, small grass fires, hazardous driving conditions and lots of dust.

At their peak at about 1 p.m., the brawny breezes were recorded at about 30 miles per hour in Bakersfield, with gusts reaching 40 miles per hour, said National Weather Service meteorologist Jim Bagnall.

The winds were caused by a high pressure system that “dropped into the Great Basin overnight,” said NWS meteorologist Cindy Bean.

Bean said humidity levels fell into the single digits, creating very dry conditions.

“This is the time of year where we start to have very changeable weather,” Bean said, and “Santa Ana-type wind conditions” are not uncommon in October and early November throughout Southern California.

As of about 5 p.m., Bagnall said, wind speeds were “trending downward,” and a blowing dust advisory had expired — but not before the winds got a chance to wreak minor havoc throughout the area.

Bakersfield Police Department spokesman Sgt. Joe Grubbs said BPD received 13 calls directly related to the weather between 7 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. He said the department also received 21 traffic hazard calls (meaning downed trees or other debris were in the road) and 45 false alarm calls during that period.

He said that while only four of those false alarms were definitively cleared as wind-related, he said other calls could’ve resulted from the weather, too.

The wind, he said, usually increases the number of false alarm calls.

“Sometimes it’ll rattle a window, blow stuff around,” he said.

He said none of the downed power lines resulted in fires, though in some cases they sparked.

Pacific Gas and Electric spokeswoman Katie Harlan Allen said numerous storm-related outages have affected thousands of customers at various times throughout the day.

The largest outage affected about 2,000 customers in the area around the Rio Bravo Golf Course, Lake Ming and Highway 178. Customers were without power from 1:20 p.m. until about 2:05 p.m., she said.

Another outage affected about 600 customers in Arvin, Allen said, while numerous others in Bakersfield affected anywhere from 12 to several hundred customers.

As of about 4:30 p.m., she said 388 customers did not have power.

Allen said the outages Wednesday were “common in a storm-like situation,” and that there were 22 crew members patrolling the Kern County area responding to calls — almost double the usual number.

Kern County Fire Department spokesman Sean Collins said three grass fires had started at various times early Wednesday afternoon, and that all three were “pretty much wrapped up” shortly thereafter.

The fires were located near Taft, on the west side of Bakersfield and another was on the east side of Bakersfield, Collins said. No structures were threatened.

Collins said that while the department wasn’t calling in extra support due to dry, potentially dangerous conditions, a “red flag warning” will be in effect until 11 p.m. Wednesday.

He recommended that area residents avoid using fuel-powered equipment such as chainsaws, mowers, motorcycles and especially machinery without appropriate spark-arresting equipment, until weather conditions improve.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said that, because of elevated levels of PM10, or larger particulate matter in the air, people should also avoid going outside as much as possible.

“You can look outside and see it sort of hazy and brown on the horizon,” said SJVAPCD spokeswoman Brenda Turner.

The district had already issued a wood-burning prohibition for Kern County Tuesday and Wednesday, to avoid contributing to deteriorating air quality.

Turner added that kids and people with respiratory problems, in particular, should exercise caution.

San Joaquin Community Hospital emergency department medical director Gregg Miller said the dusty air can “inflammate airways,” which can cause extra problems for those with emphysema or asthma.

But that’s not the only health trouble that can arise from breathing in dust — Miller said spores that lead to valley fever travel through the air.

Still, Bean, the meteorologist, emphasized that relief is on the way — with rain and temperatures in the 50s expected for Friday.

The rain, she said, “would help clean out the air.

Dust storms raise concerns in South Valley

Business Journal Wed. Nov. 2, 2011

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued a health cautionary statement on Wednesday in regard to gusty winds in Kings, Tulare and Kern counties that cause unhealthy breathing conditions.

“If you are in an area that is experiencing blowing dust, take precautions to protect yourself,” said Samir Sheikh, the overseer of the district’s air quality analysis, in a release.

The dust blown in the winds can reach unhealthy levels of particulate matter 10 microns and smaller (PM10).

Unhealthy concentrations of particulate matter potentially can lead to ailments such as aggravating lung disease, asthma attacks, acute bronchitis and potentially increase the risk of respiratory infections.

For more information, call (559) 230-6000.