

News Release

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Air Alert update

Another clean air year – but not clean enough

On Thursday afternoon, the Valley experienced a perfect storm of pollution build-up and meteorological conditions that led to a violation of the federal 1-hour ozone standard, despite the cleanest summer on record. Compounding the effects of high-pressure over the Valley, an upper level low-pressure system off southern California shut down the normal northwesterly wind flow over eastern Fresno County, resulting in unusually high ozone spikes.

In order to reach attainment and remove a \$29 million federal penalty, each of the air basin's monitoring stations must not exceed the ozone threshold of 125 ppb more than three times in three years. This year was the longest the Valley had gone without exceeding the standard, yet with the exceedance in Clovis occurring at the very end of the 2011 ozone season, the Valley cannot show attainment until 2013. This year, no monitor has recorded more than two exceedances.

"We are still in a position to see the \$29 million federal penalty removed by 2013, one year sooner than initially anticipated," said Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution District. "The District appreciates the efforts of the Valley residents and businesses this year, but we need to redouble our efforts next year."

Preliminary indications are that the inaugural Air Alert program helped lower ozone concentrations. In 2010, the 1-hour standard was exceeded 17 hours throughout the Valley. This year, with the end of the ozone season in sight, the Valley has seen just five hours of exceedances in the entire eight counties.

This 1-hour standard was revoked by the federal government in 2005, and replaced with the more health-protective 8-hour ozone standard. District officials believe the federal penalty is unfair to Valley businesses and residents that have made great investments and sacrifices to improve air quality.

Since the tougher 8-hour ozone standard was first established, the Valley has seen a significant reduction in the number of exceedances. Since 1997, when the standard was established, the number of violations of the latest 8-hour ozone standard has been reduced by nearly 60 percent.

"The current Air Alert is in effect through tomorrow, and we should do everything we can to reduce pollution," stated Sadredin. "Any additional exceedance this year will count against us next year and could delay attainment."