

News Release

For immediate release

9-13-11

Attn: Local news, weather and assignment editors



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Area wildfires impact Valley air quality

No Air Alert anticipated but residents urged to take action

A series of three wildfire complexes (groups of smaller wildfires) burning in the San Joaquin Valley is contributing to a rise in air pollution and affecting residents in pockets of the Valley. These wildfires were ignited over this past weekend lightning strikes. Smoke and ash have been verified in areas of southern Kern County over the past several days. Authorities from California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, Kern County Fire department and Sequoia National Park are actively fighting these fires.

Name of Fire Complex	Area	Acreage	Percent Contained (as of 11a.m.)
Breckenridge	Sequoia National Forest, Kern & Tulare counties	29,383 Acres	40% contained
Comanche	Lower Tejon Canyon, Kern County	25,945 Acres	60% contained
Keene	Highway 58, southeastern Kern County	10,312 Acres	88% contained

The Valley Air District has been monitoring the effects of these over the past several days, and monitors are indicating that 1-hour ozone levels are rising. Ozone levels are expected to continue to rise Wednesday and Thursday. While officials are not calling an official Air Alert and do not expect an exceedance of the federal 1-hour standard, they are asking residents to reduce their emissions and take health-protective measures as local conditions dictate.

“Whenever residents smell smoke or can see smoke at ground level in their immediate area, they should take action to avoid exposure,” said Samir Sheikh, the director who oversees the District’s air-quality analysis section.

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Wildfires impact air quality

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Smoke contains particulate matter, a form of pollution that is dangerous to human health. High levels of particulate matter – small pieces of airborne material such as soot and ash – can cause serious health problems, aggravate lung disease, trigger asthma attacks and acute bronchitis, and increase risk of respiratory infections.

In the event of exposure to smoke, people with heart or lung diseases should follow their doctors' advice for dealing with episodes of unhealthy air quality. Additionally, older adults and children should avoid prolonged exposure, strenuous activities or heavy exertion. Everyone else should reduce prolonged exposure, strenuous activities or heavy exertion.

The Air District provides current air quality information as well as forecasts that take fire impacts into account. For air-quality forecasts by county, residents can call toll-free (1 800 SMOG INFO) or visit www.valleyair.org.

For more information about the Valley Air District, call a regional office: in Fresno, 559-230-6000; in Bakersfield, 661-392-5500; and in Modesto, 209-557-6400.

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