

Unrelenting heat wave keeps students indoors for safety

By Pablo Lopez, staff writer

The Fresno Bee, Monday, Aug. 13, 2012

It's bad enough when you have to go back to school before August is half-finished. Now, a heat wave is keeping some Valley students indoors all day long.

Children in west-side schools such as Mendota and Kerman stayed indoors Monday because of excessive heat and poor air quality.

"The safety of our children and their health are our top priority," said Michael Crass, superintendent of the Mendota Unified School District.

Monday was the first day of school for Mendota Unified. Throughout the day, Crass said he and his staff monitored the weather and checked the area's air quality on the Internet.

"We're hoping this (heat wave) ends soon," he said.

That's not likely, said the National Weather Service in Hanford, which issued an excessive-heat warning Monday for the central and southern San Joaquin Valley and forecast triple-digit temperatures through Monday.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District also reported unhealthy air for Fresno, Tulare and Kern counties. Madera and Kings counties had moderate air quality.

"It's going to be hot the rest of the week," said Brian Ochs, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Hanford.

Operators of California's electricity grid have declared a Flex Alert for Tuesday to encourage conservation as inland regions continue to swelter in high heat. The California Independent System Operator said Monday that the forecast peak demand is 47,500 megawatts and conservation will be critical.

Monday, temperatures in the Valley ranged from 105 degrees to 110 degrees, he said. Fresno recorded a high of 110 degrees, two digits from a record set in 1996, Ochs said.

The forecast for the Valley today calls for highs from 101 to 107 with light winds in the morning but up to 10 mph in the afternoon. It should be mostly clear tonight with lows from 65 to 75 degrees.

A persistent high pressure ridge over the Valley has bottled in the heat, Ochs said.

So far, 11 of the first 13 days in August have hit or exceeded the century mark, pushing the year's total to 29 days. An average summer here has 38 days with high temperatures of 100 or more degrees, Ochs said. The record for triple-digit days in one year is 63, set in 1984.

High heat can cause undue stress on people, pets and livestock. Because the weather could lead to serious medical conditions such as stroke or heat exhaustion, Valley school districts were taking preventive measures.

"It's been difficult for everyone," said Kerman Unified Superintendent Robert Frausto, whose district went back to school Thursday. "The kids want to go outside and play, but they have to stay indoors when it's like this."

The extra time with students doesn't bother Sharon Nakagawa, a second-grade teacher at Sun Empire Elementary School in Kerman.

She said her students are so excited about being back at school that they don't complain about the heat. To keep them busy -- and happy -- Nakagawa said she plays indoor games with her pupils.

"They will be fine," she said. "Second-graders are more interested in showing off their new clothes and seeing their friends than complaining about how hot it is."

Classes at Fresno Unified School District don't start until next week, but district officials limited sports team practices to morning hours Monday and today because of triple-digit temperatures.

In addition, no athletic activity will be allowed between 2 and 6:30 p.m. Wednesday through Friday. During the heat wave, students have been advised to stay hydrated.

Clovis Unified also kept an eye on the weather, but it is up to coaches and athletic directors at each school site to determine when to curtail practice or bring it indoors, spokeswoman Kelly Avants said.

Classes at Fresno and Clovis Unified schools are scheduled to begin Monday. The school year at Central Unified begins Wednesday.

Heat wave and poor air expected for the week

Staff reports

Visalia Times-Delta, Monday, Aug. 13, 2012

The triple digit heatwave will continue to be the norm this week, with a very slim chance for tropical moisture being drawn into the area by next weekend.

With triple digits an almost daily occurrence so far this month, August 2012 is already dramatically different from this time last year, with only one triple digit day in August 2011, and that wasn't until August 27th, Meteorologist Scott Borgioli said.

Today's temperatures are expected to soar between 102° and 106° in the Visalia/Tulare area, and lows dropping only to around 70°.

The heat wave is also expected to keep humidity levels uncomfortable because of monsoonal influences and there is a chance of thunderstorms over the Sierras all week.

Meanwhile anyone with a sensitive respiratory condition should be on the alert that Tulare County air quality is expected to be at unhealthy levels today and the rest of the week, unless temperatures drop below 100°.

Riverbank to get \$4M, fewer trains in mine settlement

By Kevin Valine

Modesto Bee, Monday, Aug. 13, 2012

RIVERBANK -- A mine operator has agreed to pay the city nearly \$4 million in the coming decades to settle the city's lawsuit over the project, which will ship mined rock by long, slow-moving trains through downtown.

The City Council approved the settlement on a 4-0 vote in closed session at its Monday meeting. Councilman Jesse James White did not attend.

Riverbank sued Tuolumne County in May 2011 after the county approved the Cooperstown Quarry, an open-pit mine planned for 135 acres bordering Stanislaus County and about nine miles southeast of Knights Ferry.

Riverbank also sued Jack and Tricia Gardella, who own the 135 acres, and mine operator Resources Exploration Drilling LLC.

Miners could remove as much as 56 million tons of crushed rock over 75 years. The rock would be used as railroad ballast, in road building and other industrial uses. Trains from Oakdale-based Sierra Northern Railway would haul the rock through Oakdale and Riverbank.

Riverbank officials feared that the slow-moving 60-car trains would split downtown in half, tying up traffic, would delay response times for ambulances and fire engines, and would create too much noise and dust.

City officials did not say much Monday night about the settlement.

Mayor Virginia Madueño announced that it had been unanimously approved and said she had asked staff to create a special account to track the settlement money.

Riverbank did not release the settlement agreement. But Doug White, the attorney representing the city in the lawsuit, reviewed some of the agreement's highlights:

- The mine operator agrees to pay Riverbank nearly \$4 million over the life of the project. Riverbank, at its discretion, will use the money to lessen the project's impact on the city. After the meeting, White said the payment is based on a 7-cent fee for every ton of rock mined from the quarry.
- The mine operator will reimburse the city its legal costs, which are \$185,000.
- Train traffic is reduced from 20 round trips per week to six to 10. The length of the trains also is reduced, from a maximum of 60 cars for the first five round trips to 10 cars for trips six through 10. The trains cannot enter Riverbank from 7 to 9 a.m. and from 2:30 to 6:30 p.m.
- The mine operator must conduct additional asbestos testing of the mined rock to ensure Riverbank residents are not put at risk by asbestos dust and the increased risk of cancer.

White said the Gardellas and Resources Exploration Drilling have approved the settlement, as have Friends of the Mother Lode and Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center, which filed their own lawsuit against the project.

White said only Tuolumne County needs to approve it.

He said the settlement agreement should be discussed and voted on in open session at the county's Aug. 21 Board of Supervisors' meeting. White said Riverbank will release the agreement as soon as Tuolumne County does.

He added that he expects the county to approve the settlement, especially because the mine operator and landowners have signed it.

Riverbank contends that the county failed to conduct an adequate environmental review of the project's impact on the environment, air quality and public health and safety. The city contends that the county should have performed an environmental impact report for the mine, a far more extensive and expensive review than what the county conducted.

John Buckley, executive director of the Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center, said last week that the settlement addresses his group's concerns, which include mitigating the loss of oak woodlands and wildlife created by the mine, and increased greenhouse gas emissions and railroad traffic. He declined to provide specifics until all parties have approved the agreement.

Patrick Embree, managing member of Resources Exploration Drilling, expressed optimism last week that the lawsuit would be resolved. But he declined to say when the quarry would open. He said his company is securing the permits and permissions it needs to operate.