

Firefighters expect blaze to last until at least Friday

By Sentinel Staff

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CORCORAN — Officials say two haystacks that caught fire Wednesday morning may continue burning well into Friday.

The Kings County Fire Department responded to the blaze north of Corcoran around 11:30 a.m.

Battalion Chief Rick Smith said the haystacks and a large pile of almond hulls were burning when they arrived at the scene on Kansas and Sixth avenues.

"We had five engines and about 16 firefighters out there keeping it under control," Smith said. "We expect to pull some of those people back and continue monitoring the fire until it burns out."

It's unclear what caused the blaze, but spontaneous combustion is not uncommon in cases like this.

Smith said there is no way to stamp out the flames deep inside the haystacks, so they'll have to let the fire run its course. This could take several days, Smith said, and he expects it to last until Friday at least.

Officials differ on cause of smoky air

By Joe Johnson

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HANFORD — A mysterious haze enveloped Hanford on Wednesday, leaving many wondering where the strong smell of smoke had come from.

The acrid-smelling fog stretched from Hanford and Armona to Lemoore and the surrounding area.

After receiving many complaints, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District sent a team to Kings County to investigate.

Meanwhile, local officials were baffled. City and county fire departments reported no fires under way. Public Works Director Lou Camara denied that city crews were paving roadways.

Many people had theories. Some said Tulare County had arranged a controlled burn that morning. Others suggested that it sprang from work on the railroad tracks on Lacey Boulevard.

Kings County Emergency Services Director Joe Neves finally came up with an answer: He claims a large haystack fire on Kansas and Sixth avenues may have been burning throughout the night and caused the stench.

"It might have been smoldering for a long time," Neves said, "and only got reported late Wednesday morning."

Officials with SJV Air Pollution Control confirmed this as the most likely cause.

But Kings County Fire Battalion Chief Rick Smith did not seem convinced.

"The fire was several miles downwind of the city," he said. "It had to be something else. I'm told that Fresno County had a fire, which could've blown smoke down here."

An exact explanation has remained elusive. Meanwhile, by late afternoon, the smoke had lifted, leaving local residents with a rapidly evaporating mystery.