

Valley alerted to unhealthy air amid near-record high temps

By Joshua Emerson Smith

Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, Oct. 2, 2012

MERCED -- Because of unusually high late-season temperatures and stagnant atmospheric conditions, valley air officials have declared the year's second air alert.

The air alert began Saturday and is expected to continue through Wednesday. Alerts are declared Valley-wide when environmental conditions are likely to trigger violations of the federal one-hour ozone standard.

Ozone is created when high temperatures heat up a mixture of nitrogen oxide, or NOx, which is a fuel-burning emission, and volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, such as emissions from aerosol cans and waste from dairy cows.

A family tries to beat the heat Monday at Folsom Lake. With the air alert, Valley residents are asked to cut unnecessary driving, skip the gas-powered lawnmower and avoid barbecuing.

The temperature for Merced over the next few days is expected to reach triple digits and could break records.

On Monday, the high hit 99 degrees, tying the record for that date set in 1952, according to Accuweather.com. It's not expected to cool down until Thursday, when the high is forecast to be 90 degrees.

"Any help from the public is greatly needed," said Anthony Presto, spokesman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "The main thing we need residents to do is look at their daily activities that impact air quality."

Valley residents are asked to reduce unnecessary driving time and idling, as well as refrain from use of gasoline-powered equipment such as lawnmowers. Barbecuing is also highly discouraged.

"Normally, when we get to October, our ozone is not the dominant pollutant," Presto said. "As the days get shorter and cooler, ground-level ozone decreases. That's why this is an unusual event."

The earth's ozone layer protects people from ultraviolet rays from the sun, but ground-level ozone is a corrosive gas that damages lung tissue and has been linked to cancer, asthma, emphysema and other health concerns.

Because of the Valley's dangerously unhealthy air conditions, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has levied a \$29 million annual fine on residents. The money, collected through a vehicle registration fee, has been used by the regional air district to implement air-quality improvement efforts.

To meet EPA standards and get out from under the fine, the Valley has to register three years in a row in which the one-hour ozone standard is not violated at any one monitoring location more than three times.

The Valley is working on completing year one, with no violations recorded in August or September. However, this year there have been 91 ozone violations, including two at a location in Fresno.

Health digest: Air alert still on, Public Health flu shot clinics set

The Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Oct. 2, 2012

The San Joaquin Valley managed to avoid exceeding the one-hour federal ozone standard this weekend but an Air Alert is still in effect through Wednesday.

Record highs, stagnant atmosphere and emissions prompted the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to call the alert from Saturday through Wednesday, according to a news release. The air basin exceeded the one-hour ozone standard once this year and must not have more than three exceedances at any one monitor in the valley over a three-year period to avoid a \$29 million annual penalty, according to an air district news release.

In addition to bringing on a penalty, emissions can also aggravate respiratory conditions like asthma and cause sore throat and coughing, the news release said.

Residents and businesses are asked to take the following steps to lower emissions:

- * Refrain from vehicle idling
- * Carpool or vanpool
- * Avoid using drive-throughs

The Kern County Public Health Services Department will dole out shots throughout October at its annual flu vaccination clinics.

Vaccines are \$13 for the general public and available on a first-come, first-served basis, according to a health department news release.

Clinics will be held as follows:

- * 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Mondays through Fridays, Public Health Services Department, 1800 Mount Vernon Ave., Bakersfield
- * 10 a.m. to noon Tuesdays, Public Health Office, 7050 Lake Isabella Blvd., Suite 151, Lake Isabella
- * 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Thursday, Public Health Office, 810 8th St., Wasco
- * 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Oct. 10, Boys and Girls Club, 801 Niles St., Bakersfield
- * 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Oct. 10, Public Health Office, 329 Central Valley Highway, Shafter
- * 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., including lunch hour, Oct. 16, Public Health Office, 250 Ridgecrest Blvd., Ridgecrest
- * 9 a.m. to noon Oct. 17, Rasmussen Center, 115 E. Roberts Lane, Oildale
- * 9 a.m. to noon Oct. 20, Aging and Adult Services, 5357 Truxtun Ave., Bakersfield
- * 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., including lunch hour, Oct. 23, Public Health Office, 1775 Highway 58, Mojave
- * 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. Oct. 23, Pine Mountain Club, 2524 Beechwood Way, Pine Mountain
- * 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. Oct. 23, Frazier Park Recreational Building, Glendale Trail and Park Drive, Frazier Park
- * 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. Oct. 24, Public Health Office, 455 Lexington St., Delano
- * 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Oct. 25, Veterans' Hall, 125 E. F St., Tehachapi
- * 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Oct. 30, Public Health Office, 204 S. Hill St., Arvin
- * 10 a.m. to noon and 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., Oct. 30, Public Health Office, 315 N. Lincoln, Taft

People with physical limitations who cannot stand in lines should call 321-3000 for an appointment.

Valley walkers brave heat, foul air to promote asthma awareness

By Marijke Rowlan

Modesto Bee, Tuesday, Oct. 2, 2012

MODESTO - Walkers facing unexpected October heat and warnings about air quality made their way from Turlock to Modesto to raise awareness about asthma in the valley.

The Central Valley Asthma Walk, which started in Fresno on Thursday, is sponsored by the SEIU-United Healthcare Workers West union. The group is winding its way up the valley and will finish Thursday in Sacramento.

Walkers had to deal with high temperatures as the mercury rose across the valley, peaking at 95 in Modesto. That is just shy of the record temperature for Oct. 1 of 98 degrees, according to the Modesto Irrigation District.

This week, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued an air alert, warning that the heat could lead to unhealthy ozone levels.

"We didn't plan it, we didn't want it, but this is real life and we are trying to do something about it," said SEIU-UHW President Dave Regan about the air alert coinciding with the asthma awareness campaign.

No heat relief for walkers

The air quality warning started Saturday and runs until Wednesday. Anthony Presto with the valley air district said the hot, dry conditions coupled with other air contaminants can make conditions dangerous for the elderly and people with asthma, emphysema, bronchitis and other breathing ailments.

"Getting into October and having heat like this is not something we're used to," Presto said. "We normally get through September and breathe a sigh of relief. This is a bit of an unexpected occurrence."

Temperatures are expected to stay in the 90s through Wednesday. But hot weather could be sticking around even longer than expected. Drought conditions have worsened across California compared with a year ago and are expected to get worse through December.

The National Weather Service has declared a weak El Niño to be in play this winter. This means the tropical Pacific Ocean is warmer than normal, a cycle that typically alters climate patterns to produce dry conditions in Northern California and wet conditions in the south state.

Still, the October heat didn't deter those taking part in the Asthma Walk, including Waterford resident Martha Haro. The 47-year-old was among about 30 walkers who started in Fresno.

"Asthma impacted my father's life big time. I saw how hard it was on him," she said. "This has been an inspiration for me to do something. I don't have asthma, but I have allergies. And on this walk, my eyes were watering and sometimes it was hard to breathe."

Glen Enriquez, a respiratory therapist at Doctors Medical Center, also was taking part in the walk. He said valley patients are particularly prone to having problems.

"Because of pollen and pesticides and agriculture and pollutants, we have a higher ratio of asthma than the national average here," he said. "If people are aware of the problems, they can better avoid them."

The asthma walk ended for the day with an event at the Modesto Junior College East Campus quad. Booths with voter registration and health information were set up. There also was a poetry slam scheduled.

As part of the air alert, Presto said residents are encouraged to reduce their driving or idling in their cars and only use gas lawn mowers early in the morning. Those with asthma and breathing problems are encouraged to stay indoors.

Walk participants said that despite the conditions, it felt good to be a part of it.

"I feel like I'm important as a person doing this," said Phat Thammueangkun, who works at Kaiser Permanente Medical Center in Modesto and whose mother has asthma. "I'm excited to be part of this. It's important for my family and for my community. Everyone in the valley should be concerned about this."

Asthma walking tour stops in Hanford

By Joseph Luiz

Hanford Sentinel, Tuesday, Oct. 2, 2012

HANFORD — A group of health care workers from Fresno stopped at Hidden Valley Park Saturday to inform the public about the Valley's damaging air quality.

The group walked three miles from Adventist Health Medical Center to the park. The stop was part of the walking tour's weeklong trek from Fresno to Sacramento, hitting communities along the way with high asthma rates.

During the stop, participants provided information, free asthma screenings and other health services. The stop also featured a video booth where citizens could describe how asthma has affected them and their loved ones. The videos will be delivered to state officials in Sacramento.

The tour is sponsored by Service Employees International Union–United Healthcare Workers West and is part of the union's "Let's Get Healthy California" platform to improve the quality and cost of health care for chronic diseases. This is the first year the union is holding the event.

Three health care workers from Kaiser Permanente participated in the walk. Lead receptionist Chris Castaneda said he believes it is important to educate the community about the complications of asthma.

"We need to get these messages out into the community and the Valley as a whole," Castaneda said.

He said asthma is a problem that's not receiving the proper attention despite how many people are affected by it and other conditions related to the Valley's air quality. He said he has a sister that struggles with asthma who doesn't have any health insurance, which makes it hard for her to afford the medication she needs.

"This is a chance for us to step up as a community and tell the state what our troubles are," Castaneda said. "This is an issue that's only getting worse."

For Tammi Miller, an environmental services aide, the walk was very personal. Miller was born with asthma and almost died from a collapsed lung as a child. Through medication, she has been able to control it. Her son, Barry, also has asthma, although his is a more severe case. She's also had a family member that has died from an asthma attack. She enjoys hearing the stories from citizens at the tour stops.

"We're learning more about people's health conditions and how bad asthma is in the area," Miller said. "We're getting a lot out of it; I'm blessed to be here."

Irma Franco, a pharmacy technician, hasn't been personally affected by asthma, but she said she wasn't sure when she first decided to participate if she could handle all of the walking that would be involved. When she started, however, she found she enjoyed the experience.

"It's been really wonderful," Franco said. "We're getting a really positive reaction from these communities."

Franco said she has some family members that suffer from asthma. As a pharmacy technician, Franco said she sees the affects asthma has on the body on a daily basis and how much assistance these people need.

"We're trying to be there for the community and make people more aware of how serious the problem is," she said.

Franco said the group has collected nearly 100 stories so far and has walked about 25 miles since the tour began on Thursday.

The tour's leaders are hoping to gain support in Sacramento for Gov. Jerry Brown's Let's Get Healthy California Task Force, which is trying to develop ways to reduce chronic diseases over the next 10 years. The task force is planning to make recommendations to the governor in December.

The walk came as officials issued a Valley wide air alert last week because of an increase in ozone levels caused by unusual high temperatures, vehicle emissions and more. The alert is in effect until Wednesday.

Health dangers rise as Valley ozone levels spike

By Mark Grossi, staff writer

The Fresno Bee, Monday, Oct. 1, 2012

Central San Joaquin Valley residents should take urgent action to cut down on driving Tuesday as temperatures and ozone pollution spike, says the region's Air Pollution Control District.

Local air authorities alerted people from Stockton to Bakersfield last week that an air quality problem is developing. The air alert is expected to continue until Wednesday.

People are urged to refrain from idling their vehicles and to avoid using drive-through services. Carpooling is encouraged.

Children, the elderly and those with lung problems are especially vulnerable in the afternoons during such episodes. They are encouraged to protect themselves by staying indoors.

The district encourages residents to follow its air-quality reporting site.

Air alert issued for Valley

Staff reports

Visalia Times-Delta, Monday, Oct. 1, 2012

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District declared its second air alert of the year over the weekend with it expecting to continue through Wednesday.

Because of the increased temperatures and stagnant atmospheric conditions in the Central Valley, the SJVAPCD felt it necessary to take action. The high ozone levels, the district said, can exacerbate respiratory conditions such as asthma, and cause symptoms such as sore throat and coughing.

“Thanks to the public’s understanding of the issue and their efforts to reduce emissions, we’ve had a good summer so far,” said Seyed Sadredin, the air district’s executive director and air pollution control officer. “But we’re facing abnormal conditions this week and it’s critical to minimize our emissions.”

The air district said that air alerts are declared when conditions are favorable for ozone levels to exceed the federal one-hour ozone standard.

So far this year, the air district said, the air basin has had one 1-hour ozone exceedance which happened early in the summer. If the Valley has more than three exceedances in a three-year period, federal law mandates an annual \$29 million penalty.

“If we avoid any exceedances through October, we’re on track for year one of this three-year period,” Sadredin said.

During an air alert, the district said, residents and businesses are asked to put into place measures that will help reduce vehicle emissions such as refraining from vehicle idling, carpooling or vanpooling and avoid the use of drive-thru services.

Also, the district said, lawn maintenance can be moved to early mornings.