

San Joaquin County issues air quality alert

By Ross Farrow

Lodi News Sentinel, Wed., Sept. 11, 2013

Increasing ozone levels and possible smoke from lingering wildfires have prompted air officials to declare the air basin's second air alert of 2013 through today from Lodi to Bakersfield.

Steps residents can take to reduce ozone levels include carpooling, vanpooling, refraining from idling when dropping off/picking up students, using alternate transportation and refraining from using drive-thru services, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Businesses and municipalities can reduce emissions by shifting operations to early morning or late evening, when ozone levels are lower, offering flexible work schedules, promoting carpools and vanpools for employees and becoming a Healthy Air Living partner.

For more information, call 800-SMOG-INFO (800-766-4463) or visit www.valleyair.org.

San Joaquin Valley gets ozone break, air alert expires for now

By Mark Grossi, staff writer

The Fresno Bee, Wed., Sept. 11, 2013

The San Joaquin Valley averted a breach of the one-hour federal ozone standard on Monday and Tuesday, and the ozone threat seems to be subsiding for now.

An air alert declared from Stockton to Bakersfield expired Wednesday, said leaders at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

If the Valley can avoid exceeding the one-hour standard this season, a \$29 million federal penalty — paid mostly by motorists in registration fees — would end next year, air district leaders say.

Temperatures are expected to heat up into the weekend, which can mean worse air quality. Ozone has a better chance of forming in hot air.

During the three-day air alert this week, smoke and soot coming from the Rim fire and other California wildfires did not exceed the federal particle pollution threshold.

On Tuesday, the Valley did not even exceed the more stringent federal eight-hour ozone standard, breaking a streak of five consecutive exceedances.

Bad air still hanging over Merced, rest of the valley

By Rob Parsons

Sacramento Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Wed. Sep. 11, 2013

An air-pollution alert expired Wednesday, but Anica Martinez and her children were not breathing any easier.

"It's been really bad this year. My son has been out of school since Monday," Martinez, 38, said Wednesday.

Responding to increasing levels of smog pollution, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution District on Monday issued an air alert and urged residents with breathing conditions to stay indoors. Officials don't expect to see much improvement in air quality until the weekend.

Smog levels have spiked in recent weeks because of increased motor vehicle traffic after school resumed in the valley, the pollution district said.

Spokesman Anthony Presto said Monday's air alert was specifically focused on smog, but other factors such as smoke from wildfires and almond harvest dust can also "wreak havoc" for some, such as Martinez and her children.

"With the smoke and the dust from (almond) harvest, it just feels different than last year," Martinez said.

Winds continue carrying smoke from the Rim fire in Stanislaus National Forest and Yosemite National Park into the valley, and conditions are not expected to improve until early next week, according to the National Weather Service in Hanford.

“At least for the short term, we’re all blocked up in the valley,” meteorologist Keven Durfee said. “Our weather pattern for the next few days is stagnant.”

Durfee said residents should expect temperatures approaching 100 degrees over the next few days, with cooler weather beginning to creep in over the weekend.

“It will be Monday or Tuesday before we see any noticeable changes in the weather pattern, but cooler, drier air is coming,” he said.

With nearly 100,000 acres of almonds being harvested in Merced County, the dust created when commercial farmers shake the trees is also effecting air quality.

County agricultural Commissioner David Robinson said months of dry weather forced almond farmers to begin harvesting early this year. Harvest season typically runs from early August to late October.

“But (harvesting) can last into November, depending on conditions,” Robinson said.

While some new harvest equipment aims to cut down on the amount of dust created during almond harvest, some dust is inevitable.

Robinson said almonds generated more than \$400 million in Merced County in 2011, making it the area’s second largest commodity behind milk – two key components to the region’s dominate ag economy.

Vance D’Escoto, principal of Donn B. Chenoweth Elementary, said school officials monitor air quality status daily.

“It (air quality) can change throughout the day and we make adjustments based on those changes,” D’Escoto said.

Students with breathing issues were kept inside on Monday, but by Wednesday conditions had improved and all children were on the playground at recess, he said.

Fall is typically a tough time for Martinez and her family, but this year has been harder, she said.

“We’re treating it like rainy days, mostly,” Martinez said. “We’re just staying inside. It’s hard because the kids want to go outside and play.”