

Aspen Fire causing unhealthy air across SJ Valley

Associated Press

In the Fresno Bee, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Thurs., Aug. 1, 2013

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Air quality authorities say smoke from a wildfire east of Fresno and wildfires in Northern California and Oregon has the potential to cause serious health problems for people living in parts of California's Central Valley.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued a health cautionary statement on Tuesday for the entire air basin. The air is described as unhealthy for sensitive groups in Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and Kern counties, as well as Sequoia National Park.

Officials say the Aspen Fire in the Sierra National Forest about 75 miles northeast of Fresno is contributing to the smoky air. The fire near Shaver Lake has consumed more than 21 square miles. It is 35 percent contained.

Fire produces fine particulate matter that can contribute to asthma attacks.

Smoke also is impacting the Sacramento area, but to a lesser extent.

Wildfire smoke spreads in Valley, sparks health concerns

By Mark Grossi, staff writer

In the Fresno Bee and Modesto Bee, Thurs., Aug. 1, 2013

Wildfire smoke continues to drift into the San Joaquin Valley, causing soot levels to climb, but the problem could get worse by the weekend, local air-quality leaders say.

A high pressure system is expected to settle into the region by Saturday, possibly allowing soot and ozone levels to spike as they did earlier this week, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The smoke is from the Aspen fire near Huntington Lake, as well as wildfires in Northern California and Oregon. On Tuesday and early Wednesday, the smoke pushed air quality beyond the federal particle standard in Madera, Merced and Stockton. The district issued a health cautionary statement.

A layer of marine air is expected to briefly ease the problems today, but residents throughout the Valley are advised to avoid vigorous outdoor exercise if they smell smoke.

Children, seniors and people with lung and heart problems should be cautious about their outdoor exposure this week.

"We've called outdoor camps in the Sierra to warn them about the air quality," district spokeswoman Jaime Holt said. "We've alerted county public health officers. This is a serious concern at this point."

Valley residents are encouraged to use the air district's real-time monitoring website to check air quality on the monitor closest to their homes.

Elevated soot levels Tuesday added to ozone problems in Fresno, Clovis, Parlier, Hanford and Turlock. Merced's dirty air breached both the ozone and the soot standards Tuesday.

During Sierra Nevada wildfires, smoke often drifts into the Valley in the evening hours as downslope breezes develop, air officials said. During the day, the Valley haze begins to lift a little as breezes begin to move upslope.

Wildfires also put out gases that create ozone. Ozone is a corrosive gas that forms in warm weather and sunlight. It damages skin, eyes and lungs. The Valley has one of the worst ozone problems in the nation.

Soot is categorized as PM-2.5, a microscopic particle that can be drawn deep into the lungs and pass into the blood system. PM-2.5 is more dangerous than ozone, according to health scientists.

The combination of the two air pollutants is considered a threat even to healthy lungs, scientists say.

Air quality from California wildfire could deteriorate by weekend, officials say

Associated Press

Lodi News Sentinel, Thurs., Aug. 1, 2013

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Fires create haze over Tracy, San Joaquin Valley

by Glenn Moore

Tracy Press, Wed. July 31, 2013

Grass fires burning both to the south and to the north of the San Joaquin Valley are contributing to haze blanketing the hills south of Tracy on Tuesday, July 30. Glenn Moore/Tracy Press

Tracy residents might be noticing the haze that's recently been hanging over the city and San Joaquin Valley.

Smoke from the Aspen fire south in Fresno County and other grass fires north near the Oregon border has settled over the area and prompted an air quality health warning from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution District on Tuesday, July 30.

The smoke blanket has covered parts of San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and Kern counties along with some foothill and mountain areas, according to the air pollution district.

The health warning was issued Tuesday because the district expects air quality to deteriorate as the smoke is expected to linger through the end of the week.

Anthony Presto, spokesman for the air pollution district, said residents who see or smell smoke should remain indoors or try to filter the smoke by other means.

The smoke raises the fine particulate matter in the air, a move the air pollution district said can lead to serious health problems including lung disease, asthma attacks and an increased risk of heart attacks or stroke.

An air quality monitoring station at the Tracy Airport on Wednesday, July 31, shows the particulate levels as moderate and ozone levels as unhealthy for sensitive groups.

Prolonged or strenuous outdoor activities when particulates and the ozone at these levels can be dangerous, according to the district.

The foothills south and west of Tracy and Mount Diablo were covered by a thick haze much of the week.

Presto said the health warning will be in effect until the grass fires are extinguished.

For Tracy air quality readings, go online:

http://www.valleyair.org/programs/raan/raan_index.htm?x=TracyAP.

Aspen Fire now 35 percent contained

Staff reports

The Sierra Star, Wed., July 31, 2013

The Aspen Fire, which was caused by lightning and was discovered Tuesday, July 23, is still burning on the Sierra National Forest-High Sierra Ranger District. The fire is burning below Stump Springs Road north of Aspen Springs near the Mammoth Pool Reservoir.

The fire has burned more than 14,000 acres and is 35% contained. Three structures are being threatened but none have been damaged. Two injuries have been reported.

Total fire personnel on hand is almost 1,800. A helicopter base has been set up in North Fork at the Old Mill Site, and seven large helicopters were located there as of July 30. Helicopter pilots are dipping the giant water buckets into Mammoth Pool and the San Joaquin River to retrieve water to dump on the fire. The buckets can carry about 750-900 gallons of water. Over a period of three days (July 27-29) a DC-10 (airplane) dropped 66,000 gallons of retardant.

According to the Sierra National Forest Incident Information System site, the South Central Sierra Interagency Incident Management Team assumed command of the Aspen Fire at 6 p.m. July 24. The team is working with the Sierra National Forest to manage suppression efforts.

The fire is in steep, rugged, inaccessible terrain. According to reports, progress has been made with indirect line on the northwest side of the fire, and indirect line has been completed on the northeast and southwest sides of the fire. Crews continue to use direct attack when possible and are making good progress. However, smoke is accumulating in low laying areas of the fire, which hampers firefighters' visibility on the ground and in the air.

Recreation and businesses remain open in the Shaver Lake, Huntington Lake, Lake Thomas Edison, Florence Lake and the Mono Hot Springs areas. The closure of Stump Springs Road remains in effect. The Kaiser Wilderness has also been closed as well as 10 campgrounds in the area.

The cost in manpower and equipment to battle the fire has reached \$10.6 million.

Details: inciweb.org/incident/3552/.

Air officials issue smoke health caution

Smoke emissions have prompted air officials to issue a health cautionary statement. The health caution is in place until the fire is extinguished. The air district will continue to monitor the impact these wildfires are having on air quality.

"If you can see or smell smoke in your area, you are most likely being affected," said Samir Sheikh, the air district's director over air quality analysis. "If possible, stay inside to avoid breathing in the smoke."

Officials said smoke from fires produces fine-particulate matter, which can cause serious health problems including lung disease, asthma attacks and increased risk of heart attacks and stroke. Older adults and children should avoid prolonged exposure or heavy exertion, depending on their local conditions.

Residents can check their nearest air monitor at valleyair.org/Programs/RAAN/raan_landing.htm.

Details: Air Quality Regional office, (559) 230-6000.

Foundation says air measure component is illegal

By Lois Henry, staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Wed., July 31, 2013

Representatives of the Pacific Legal Foundation, which is suing the state over its "cap and trade" program, have been making the rounds up and down the state educating business people and average citizens about what they say is a harmful hidden tax rather than a simple regulatory scheme to improve the environment.

Tuesday they spoke to the Kern County Farm Bureau in front of a group of about 40 people.

Cap and trade is one of several programs authorized by Assembly Bill 32 (AB32), passed in 2006. The bill's goal is to reduce the state's greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020.

One method it authorized is cap and trade, under which industries are only allowed a certain amount of emissions "credits."

If they emit more, they must purchase credits in an auction run by the California Air Resources Board (CARB).

Pacific Legal Foundation is suing saying the auction is an unconstitutional state tax because it wasn't enacted by two-third majorities of both chambers of the Legislature, and that CARB has no authority to sell the credits.

Others have said cap and trade doesn't rise to the level of a tax because there's no requirement to buy the credits. Industries could just cut emissions instead. Some have expanded that argument to say industry has no right to pollute and, thus, no right to free credits under a cap-and-trade system.

All of that will be hashed out in court.

On Tuesday, Pacific Legal Foundation attorney Tony Francois was in Kern answering questions about the lawsuit and the intricacies of the program.

Francois said most people don't understand how much cap and trade will affect their daily lives.

"The real effect of the CO2 limits will impact the use and price of fuel," he said.

CARB has set a cap on emissions from burning coal, natural gas, gasoline, diesel and propane, he said. To achieve that cap, the use of those fuels will have to be reduced.

He said by 2015, fuel wholesalers will have to report their sales volumes to CARB, which will use a conversion formula to determine how much of that fuel becomes greenhouse gas emissions. Those wholesalers will then have to buy credits to account for those emissions, Francois said.

Those costs will be passed on to consumers who will "think it's just another price increase and blame industry, not realizing it was a cost from the credit auction.

"That's how it becomes a hidden tax," he said. "It's very convenient for CARB, which hides behind the very industry it's vilifying."

Another suit against AB32 by the California Chamber of Commerce says the law didn't authorize CARB to impose fees other than those needed to cover administrative costs of implementing a greenhouse gas emissions program.