

Bad air quality not going away

By Esther Avila, staff writer

Porterville Recorder, Thursday, Jan 9, 2014

Unhealthy air threatens sporting events

For the past two weeks, the air quality in the Valley has been unfavorable — either for sensitive groups or for everyone.

“From January 1 to January 7, this has been an unhealthy area,” said Anton Simanov, outreach community representative for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, talking about the Porterville area.

It is all due to a ridge of high pressure that has refused to leave, resulting in stagnated air conditions, he said. The pollutants will continue to settle in the Valley, until the right combination of wind or pressure and rain clear the haze.

“We are not seeing any rain or wind. Our situation is pretty stagnate. It’s across the whole Valley. And the conditions are not helping,” Simanov said. “Looking at the current trend and looking at the weather forecast, it is not looking very good.”

Without wind or rain in the near forecast, the pollution is expected to continue, he said.

In the meantime, local schools are doing what they can to keep students safe.

Several local schools had the red “Poor Air Quality” flag provided by San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District flying next to the American and California flags.

At Burton School District’s William R. Buckley Elementary School, the red flag was flying for the second consecutive day.

Burton District school nurse, Amy Martinez, checks the air quality and let’s the P.E. teachers and custodians of each school site know the results, said Buckley Elementary principal Chastity Lollis.

“This is the first time ever we have been on an inside schedule when it is cold outside,” Lollis said. “Usually we see this kind of thing when it is hot. Not in January.”

But the school is prepared for unhealthy air quality days, she said.

“We have four flags — green, yellow, orange and red,” Lollis said. “The red is flying now. It’s a very unhealthy air quality day and when that happens, we keep our students inside for recess and P.E. We treat it as a rainy day schedule. Our concern is for the health and well being of all our students.”

When the area’s Air Quality Index, AQI for ozone and particulate matter — sooty air created by diesel engines, cars, and people burning fireplaces or other material, reaches “Unhealthy” or “Very unhealthy” status, a red flag is flown over the school.

The colorful flags indicate the following categories:

- ° Green — AQI of 0 to 50; Healthy air quality, outdoor activities permitted.
- ° Yellow — AQI 51 to 100; Moderate air quality. The air is unhealthy only for extremely sensitive children and adults. Outdoor activities permitted but school staff watch the children carefully for signs of distress, ensuring immediate access to medications for students with asthma.
- ° Orange — AQI 101 to 150; Unhealthy for sensitive groups, especially those with respiratory and cardiac conditions, those under the age of 18 and over the age of 55. From October to February, outdoor activities are only recommended between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- ° Red — AQI 151 to 200; Unhealthy air for everyone. All students participate in indoor activities.
- ° Purple — 201 to 400; Very unhealthy and hazardous for everyone. All students participate in indoor activities.

Lollis said she has two giant bounce houses in the cafeteria. The students jump and play in the bounce house during recess.

"I really like this," said Karson Amos, fourth grader at Buckley Elementary. "Everybody has a chance to jump. There's a schedule and we all take turns. Every class gets 10 minutes at a time and we go in groups of five. But only during recess. Not at P.E."

Physical education normally runs for half an hour, five days a week, he said.

"On regular days, we exercise, then we run one lap and then play a game," Amos said. "But on these days, we just come in here and we watch a movie."

On Wednesday, BEST, Burton's after school program under the direction of Karen Spork, students also utilized the jump houses. The children screamed and chanted songs and rhymes as they jumped to their hearts' content.

Other indoor activities include playing 'silent ball' or playing with Lego blocks or board games, Stork said.

District Athletic Director Rich Rankin for the Porterville Unified School district said the air quality is the worst he has ever seen.

"The last two days, we have sent warnings to the athletic directors at each school regarding the bad air quality," Rankin said. "We've advised them about the poor air quality and have asked they take the necessary precautions."

Reducing the amount of conditioning and increasing the number of breaks are among the precautions being taken, Rankin said.

"This is the first time we are dealing with this at this time of the year," Rankin said. "We've had a few bad days of 110 degrees where we had to cancel an event but never in January. This is not the time of the year for that. I have never seen this before. We're in uncharted territory."

Rankin said they are monitoring the air quality and looking at Wednesday afternoon's game. If necessary, they will make a phone call and cancel the game, he said at 2:45 p.m. Wednesday.

"It's not the ideal situation and hope we can still play," Rankin said.

The game was not canceled but with the poor air quality expected to continue, Rankin said he will be keeping a close look at the daily numbers.

High school soccer: Bad air cancels four Tulare-Kings matches

Staff reports

The Fresno Bee, Wed., Jan. 8, 2014

West Yosemite League boys and girls soccer matches between Hanford-Redwood and Hanford West-Lemoore have been postponed because of poor air quality.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District lists the air in Tulare, Kings and Kern counties as unhealthy and recommends avoiding outside activity.

The air quality is rated unhealthy for sensitive groups in Fresno and Madera counties.

The Hanford-Redwood matches are rescheduled for Jan. 16, while the Hanford West-Lemoore games were pushed back to Feb. 3.

EPA moves to cut woodstove pollution

By John Myers

Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, Jan. 9, 2014

DULUTH, Minn. — The smell of wood smoke wafting on a cold winter's night may be a hallmark of life in many states, but the federal government says it also may be a health hazard.

The Environmental Protection Agency on Friday moved to reduce pollution from new woodstoves, wood boilers and pellet stoves used for heating purposes starting in 2015.

The new nationwide rules would not affect fireplaces or wood burners already in people's homes and businesses but would restrict the sale of new wood burners to those that emit about 80 percent less pollution than old models - namely particulate matter, carbon monoxide and organic compounds.

The new rules, in the works for more than two years, also do not apply to campground or backyard fire pits or wood-fired barbecues.

Particle pollution, or soot, is linked to a wide range of serious health effects, including heart attacks, strokes and asthma attacks. Several studies have linked wood smoke to premature death among people who suffer from heart and lung disease.

Many wood furnaces and stoves burn inefficiently, sending a lot of smoke, creosote and soot up the chimney. That particulate matter builds up to cause smog, sometimes in levels unhealthy to people in places like Denver, Albuquerque, N.M., and Fresno, Calif.

"Smoke from residential woodstoves and heaters is a significant source of harmful, fine-particle pollution in many areas of the country," said Janet McCabe, acting assistant administrator for EPA's Office of Air and Radiation. "Today's proposed rule would make new stoves and heaters more efficient and about 80 percent cleaner starting in 2015."

She said that by reducing air pollution associated with asthma attacks, heart attacks and strokes, the new rules will save Americans up to \$2.4 billion a year in health care costs.

Indoor wood burning stoves and outdoor wood boilers are a popular method of heating in northern states, with the region's abundant and inexpensive supply of firewood, especially in rural areas. A Minnesota Pollution Control Agency survey found state residents burned about 1.3 million cords of wood over the winter of 2011-2012 for heat and pleasure, double the amount of 10 years ago and the highest since the energy crisis of the late 1970s.

The survey found the highest level of wood burning in the northeastern region of the state

The U.S. Energy Information Administration estimates 11.5 million U.S. homes heat with wood. The EPA says about 85,700 wood-burning heating devices will be made and sold annually by 2015.

For wood stoves, the new rules would require a maximum of 4.5 grams per hour of pollution in 2015 and reducing that to 1.5 grams per hour by 2020.

Daryl Lamppa, president of Lamp Manufacturing stove works in Tower, Minn., has been making high efficiency wood burning stoves for years. His design already meets the new federal standards. In tests conducted by an EPA-certified independent lab in Wisconsin in 2011, his stoves produced less than 1 gram of particulates per hour - and in some tests as low as 0.45 grams.

"We're already there. This is good news for us," Lamppa told the Duluth, Minn., News Tribune. He said the key to increasing pollutants is by vastly increasing efficiency - how well and how completely the wood burns. "But there are a lot of stoves on the market out there that are going to have to make some serious changes ... or get out of the business."

Lamppa said his plant is nearly two months behind in meeting orders for his patented Kuuma Vapor Fire indoor wood gasification furnaces. The federal government already has required a thermal efficiency rating of 75 or higher to qualify for the current federal energy tax credit for stoves. The Kuuma hit 84 percent. Lamppa's stove, intended to replace an indoor furnace, has a fuel combustion efficiency rating between 98.1 and 99.4 percent.

Meanwhile, for outdoor wood boilers, also called hydronic heaters, emissions would be limited to 0.32 pounds per million Btu heat output, with a cap of 7.5 grams per hour starting in 2015 and then a limit of 0.06 pounds per million Btu by 2020.

While the new EPA rules do not apply to traditional indoor fireplaces, at least for now, the EPA has invited comments on whether new fireplaces should be included.

The EPA also is considering allowing until 2023 for the final restrictions to be in place, depending on public comments. The agency will take comments on the proposal now before it becomes final next year.

For more information on burning wood for heat, and the new wood burner regulations, go to epa.gov/burnwise.

[Fresno Bee Earth Log, Tuesday, Jan. 7, 2014:](#)

What's 'clean burning'?

By Mark Grossi

In the midst of another soot siege in the Valley's air, the question arises: What does "clean burning" in your fireplace mean? You hear the term in the media. Does it mean you can burn if there's a daily burn ban?

Short answer: No. You can't burn any kind of wood, pellets or manufactured logs, such as Duraflame, when the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District prohibits burning in your county.

"Clean burning" applies only to days when burning is allowed. It isn't a requirement. It's a suggestion from the air district.

Clean burning involves the use of federally certified wood-burning stove or similar device. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency adds that manufactured logs burn cleaner than regular wood.

If you check the air district's page and see that burning is banned in your county, do everyone a favor. Don't burn.