

Temperatures, ozone on the rise again

By Ana B. Ibarra, Merced Sun-Star staff writer

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As temperatures rise, ground level ozone pollution typically returns to the San Joaquin Valley.

The National Weather Service in Hanford expects temperatures to remain in the mid 80s until Monday. With no precipitation anticipated within the next week, extreme drought conditions will continue.

From July 2013 to April this year, Merced has received 4.67 inches of rain, which is 6.49 inches short of average. According to meteorologist Brian Ochs, this lack of precipitation will have long-term effects as several seasons, an estimated two to three years, of above-average precipitation are needed to help relieve drought.

Warmer temperatures are usually accompanied by a trend of rising ozone levels.

Ozone is formed when sunlight bakes other pollutants in the air. The pollution buildup occurs when temperatures rise and conditions remain stagnant with no airflow, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Unhealthy levels of ozone can cause serious health effects. Breathing ozone can generate health problems such as chest pain, coughing, throat irritation and congestion. Ozone can also aggravate diseases such as asthma, emphysema and chronic bronchitis, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

The air district suggests residents check the Real-Time Air Advisory Network on its website at www.valleyair.org for hourly air quality information. RAAN is a system specifically designed to inform Valley residents about local air quality. It also provides health guidelines for outdoor exercises based on five air quality levels. RAAN updates may be obtained via text or email by registering online.

Anthony Presto, a spokesman for the district, said there are several things residents can do to help reduce air pollution. Some examples include carpooling, walking, riding a bike or taking public transportation instead of driving.

“Another good way to help is to avoid idling,” Presto said. “Instead of going through a drive-through, park your car and go inside to order. You can also just take lunch from home to work, and that way you’ll avoid having to drive anywhere for lunch. In the long run, it’ll save you money and you’ll eat healthier.”

Presto also recommends to avoid idling when picking up children from school because vehicle emissions are dangerous to children’s health.

Presto says he believes that with the help and cooperation of residents, air quality can be improved significantly.

“Even though we have an air quality problem, it is consistently improving,” Presto said. “Our air is cleaner now than it’s ever been.”

Presto suggests residents take advantage of several incentives and programs designed to improve air quality in the Valley. Information on these programs can be found at www.valleyair.org.