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Heat and pollution: not a good combination for your health

Posted by Ana B. Ibarra

When I moved to Merced four months ago, there were a lot of things I didn't know about the Central Valley. I sure didn't know how hot it can get here, and I wasn't aware of the pollution problems present in this area. As the health reporter, I soon learned that these two go hand in hand. The heat combined with pollution in the air can create toxic compounds, such as ozone smog and particulate matter.

And as you can imagine, dirty air typically triggers health problems. Pollution can set off respiratory problems, such as asthma, bronchitis and pneumonia. Allergies and cardiovascular diseases can also be greatly affected by poor air quality.

So what can we do to get a breath of clean air? For starters, we can loosen the tight bond with our vehicle. Making use of public transportation when possible, or using our bikes to make that short trip to the convenience store may help. After all, Merced does have a lot more bike paths than I imagined. Also, combining our errands and reducing idling time can make a difference. As a fan of drive-thrus and keeping the car on for air conditioning purposes, I know how hard it can be to trim down idling time, but be it all for our well-being. Also, if plans of purchasing a new vehicle is in your near future plans, consider buying a small, fuel-efficient model.

At home, avoid gardening tools that run on gasoline. Engines in older gas-powered lawn mowers can produce eight times the pollution that a car engine does. The best alternative would be a push-hand mover and rake. Plus, think of the workout you'll get.

Lastly and most obviously, conserve energy in the household by turning off all unneeded lights and setting your air conditioner on energy saver mode. Not only will you join the green team, but you'll also have lower bills.