

Air turns corrosive in October heat wave

By Mark Grossi

Fresno Bee, Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, Oct. 7, 2014

Record heat and stagnant conditions have turned the San Joaquin Valley into a bowl of dirty air.

Valley air authorities are urging residents to drive less, avoid letting vehicles idle at drive-up windows and put off yard work that involves gasoline-powered equipment. In other words, pretend it's late August instead of early October.

Ozone, a corrosive gas that forms in heat and sunlight, spiked above the federal standard over the last four days, according to monitoring data on the California Air Resources Board Web page.

On Sunday and Monday, the exceedances were widespread, including Fresno, Clovis, Modesto, Tracy, Hanford, Bakersfield and Visalia.

"October is still ozone season in the Valley," said Jaime Holt, spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "But it has been particularly intense the last few days because of the heat."

On Monday, records were set in Madera, Hanford and Merced. Fresno's 98-degree reading missed the record by one degree.

Ozone peaks in the afternoons, often at times when parents are picking up children at school.

The pollutant forms when oxides of nitrogen and reactive organic gases combine. The oxides of nitrogen come from combustion sources, such as vehicles and fires, and the reactive organic gases are fumes from paints, gasoline and dairies.

Ozone attacks the lungs, triggering asthma and other lung ailments. Health researchers say children and the elderly are the most susceptible. They advise people to stay indoors when the gas is spiking.

Valley air officials say the ozone episode probably will continue on Wednesday. People can track the air quality hourly in their area on the district's online monitoring system.

Air District warns of reduced air quality

The Porterville Recorder, Tuesday, Oct. 7, 2014

Valley Air District officials are urging residents to reduce driving and other emission-producing activities this week due to unseasonably high temperatures. Although ozone numbers are not forecast to reach Air Alert levels, the high temperatures and stagnant conditions may lead to elevated ozone levels, unusual for this time of year.

Despite abnormally high temperatures and a string of wildfires, this year has proven to be another year of historically low ozone levels for the Valley. In fact, this summer the Valley set new records for having the longest stretch of consecutive days without exceeding the most stringent eight-hour standard (75 ppb) established by the federal government.

The Air District credits Valley businesses, farmers and residents for the significant progress the Valley has made in reducing ozone pollution.

"We were prepared to declare Air Alerts throughout the summer, especially after the start of the school year, to urge Valley residents to cut back on driving. However, ozone levels never reached the trigger level necessary to declare an Air Alert," said Seyed Sadredin, the District's air pollution control officer and executive director.

If the trend continues, 2014 will be the second consecutive year during which the Valley has not had a violation of the 1-hour ozone standard. This is the standard for which the Valley has been subject to the \$29 million penalty under the federal Clean Air Act. The Air District has already submitted a formal request to the California Air Resources Board and the federal EPA to revoke this penalty and is awaiting a formal response to declare the Valley in attainment of this challenging standard.

"With just a few critical days left in the ozone season for the year, we are asking the public to help stay below the standard, which will force EPA action to lift the \$29 million penalty," added Sadredin.

Local air officials are reminding Valley residents to use air-friendly strategies including:

- reducing driving by trip linking and eliminating unnecessary trips.
- walking or biking to school.
- reducing idling when dropping off or picking up students.
- carpooling and using mass transportation.