

Kings County sees several poor air quality days

By Shannon Williams, staff reporter

Hanford Sentinel, Tuesday, Jan. 13, 2015

A combination of fog and trapped soot, dust and smoke has resulted in several unhealthy air quality days in the Valley.

Since the beginning of 2015, Kings County has already seen six days of dangerous levels of fine particulate matter in the atmosphere, according to San Joaquin Valley Air District Spokesperson Janelle Schneider.

Schneider said the poor air quality and hazy atmosphere can likely be attributed to wood burning.

"Residential wood burning is the single largest source of fine particulates in the winter," Schneider said. "[So] it really is important that people adhere to the regulations."

In the last several days, the district has restricted residential wood burning in Kings County, as well as in several other neighboring counties.

Inhaling of the particulates can often result in health issues, such as asthma and various other lung problems. Schneider suggests those who already have health issues, elderly and young children to limit their outdoor activity during poor air quality forecasts.

"Depending on someone's personal health problems, I recommend that [people] modify their activity appropriately," Schneider said, adding that subscribing to the district's Real-Time Air Advisory Network is also advised. RAAN is the district's 24-hour online air quality information system.

Scott Borgioli, meteorologist at WeatherAg, said he predicts the poor air quality to likely linger into the coming weeks.

"I'm not extremely hopeful that we are going to have a storm system that is going to come through to mix up the air quality," he said. "We could have a little break in the unhealthy air quality this weekend, but it looks like the poor air quality will pick up again next week."

"It is not good news."

Borgioli said a breakthrough of storms expected to begin around Jan. 22-25 might aid in clearing up the harmful Valley atmosphere.

For current air quality and designated burn day information, visit www.valleyair.org.

Pacific Ethanol plans cogeneration upgrade in Stockton

By Reed Fujii, staff writer

Stockton Record and Lodi News Sentinel, Tuesday, Jan. 13, 2015

Pacific Ethanol Inc. announced Monday it would install a \$12 million cogeneration system at its Stockton ethanol plant, providing electrical power and steam heat, while at the same time burning waste gases and reducing smog-producing emissions from the facility.

The 3.5 megawatt cogeneration system, expected to be completed by mid-2016, will give the plant among the lowest air emissions in the ethanol industry, company officials said.

"The Stockton cogeneration system will replace most of the electricity we currently purchase from the grid and will reduce our energy costs by an estimated three to four million dollars per year," said Neil Koehler, the company's president and CEO. "Rather than destroying waste gases, we will reuse them as a source of process energy, reducing costs and improving profitability."

Pacific Ethanol has contracted with Dresser-Rand to supply two 1.75 megawatt gas turbine generators with heat recovery steam generators, and two gradual oxidizers that are manufactured by Ener-Core.

It is those patented gradual oxidizers that allow waste gases and volatile organic compounds to be incorporated as fuel, while greatly reducing emissions of nitrogen oxides.

Officials with San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District welcomed the announcement.

“The district has had some preliminary discussions with Pacific Ethanol about their cogeneration concept but has not yet received a permit application, so we don’t have any details about the system,” said Dave Warner, deputy air pollution control officer. “In general, though, replacing the existing thermal oxidizer with a lower-emitting system that also produces power and heat would be a positive advancement of the current Pacific Ethanol operation.”

Pacific Ethanol spokesman Paul Koehler said the Stockton plant currently uses natural gas to power boilers for steam heat and buys electricity from the grid. To eliminate waste gases and volatile organic compounds given off by ethanol production, combines them with additional natural gas and burns the mix in what’s called a regenerative thermal oxidize or RTO.

The new cogeneration system would fundamentally change those processes, although the plant still would purchase utility natural gas and some electric power.

“We won’t have to spend gas to run the RTO and we take the waste gas and it contributes to our production of energy and steam,” Paul Koehler said.

He also said they have targeted a low level of nitrogen oxide emissions, about 1 part per million, as opposed to the 7 parts per million standard of existing technology.

“If this becomes successful, it’ll be charting a new course for the cogeneration industry in California on emissions,” he said.

Koehler indicated the investment will create some temporary construction jobs, but no additional permanent positions.

Pacific Ethanol, whose stock trades on the Nasdaq stock exchange under the ticker symbol PEIX, is the leading producer and marketer of low-carbon fuels in the western U.S. It operates and manages four ethanol production facilities, with a total annual production capacity of 200 million gallons, in Boardman, Ore.; Burley, Idaho; Stockton; and Madera.

[Fresno Bee Earth Log, Monday, Jan. 12, 2015:](#)

Thank the drippy fog for better air on Monday morning

By Mark Grossi

The air wasn’t so cruddy on Monday morning in Fresno, Clovis, Hanford, Visalia or most any other place in the San Joaquin Valley – in contrast to the weekend.

In Bakersfield, air quality was actually good, especially after a storm passed through.

Yet, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District ordered folks not to burn wood at home on Monday. And the AirNow website from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency predicts the Valley’s air would be the worst in the country Monday – by far, the worst.

What gives? Short version: The atmosphere can change quickly. But you still couldn’t burn wood on Monday.

The fog on Monday was the drippy variety. Air district executive director Seyed Sadredin said the wet fog bogged down the bad particles. A lot of them wound up on the ground in the early morning.

Drier air allows the particles to hang in the air, Sadredin said. But conditions could change quickly again as the sun returns, allowing the particles to float easily and turn the air back into a mess.

That’s why I point people to the air district’s hourly updates online, otherwise known as Real-Time Air Advisory Network or RAAN. Find out what’s going on in your area before you send your children out to play or exercise.

The air district did not change its no-burn order for Monday, though. From Madera County south to Kern, nobody is allowed to burn wood in open fireplaces or even in certified, registered inserts today.

Sadredin said: "We want to prevent a buildup of particulates. We will assess each afternoon and come out with new forecasts each day."