

Air District urges Valley residents to continue clean air trend

By Alysson Aredas

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Now that school is back in session, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is urging the public to minimize vehicle emissions associated with back-to-school traffic, such as idling when dropping off students, in order to successfully close a record-setting clean air summer season.

“Thanks to the vigilance and cooperation of residents and businesses throughout the Valley, we’ve had a great summer with regard to keeping ozone levels down,” said Seyed Sadredin, the District’s air pollution control office and executive director. “We urge the public to be even more mindful of their contributions to poor air quality during this crucial back-to-school window.”

Despite the fact that the summer encompassed triple-digit temperatures, multiple wildfires, and the continuation of the historic drought, the Valley still managed to maintain clean air, an unprecedented feat. This success of the season was made possible in part by times of good atmospheric dispersion from passing storms from May to July.

The Valley has continued to overcome various challenges in order to improve tremendously and continually set new records over the past 35 years. If it weren’t for the District’s control strategy through various attainment planning efforts, incentive programs, and commitment from stakeholders, this would not have been possible.

The District aims to ensure this clean air trend throughout the beginning of the school year, which usually triggers higher emission levels, by calling Air Alerts when conditions such as increased emissions, high temperatures, and stagnant air flow are favorable for ozone accumulation.

During an Air Alert, which can span over several days, residents and businesses are urged to reduce smog-forming emissions by driving less, refraining from idling their vehicles, carpooling or vanpooling and avoiding the use of drive-through services.

“Above all, try to limit vehicle idling,” said San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District spokesperson Anthony Presto. “With more awareness and participation, we should keep on track.”

When combined with higher temperatures and little to no air circulation, high emission levels have the possibility of exceeding federal air quality standards, as well as causing respiratory and heart problems, especially among children, the elderly and those with existing health concerns.

In addition to negative health effects, ozone violations can result in monetary penalties for Central Valley residents.

In 2010, the Environmental Protection Agency fined the Central Valley \$29 million for violating federal air-quality standards. Penalty fees can be assessed on businesses that are not using clean-air technology and practices.

In order to help mitigate the amount of pollution that is associated with school site vehicle idling, the District partnered with hundreds of Valley Schools with the Healthy Air Living Schools program, which gives schools the tools and materials they need to encourage parents to “Turn the Key & Be Idle Free” when picking up or dropping off students at school sites.

The program also trains schools on how to use the Real-time Air Advisory Network, which allows schools, parents, and Valley residents to check their current, localized air quality through by subscribing to RAAN.

For more information on these tools, visit valleyair.org/RAAN or valleyair.org/WAAQS. Residents can also check the dairy air quality forecast by calling 1-800-SMOG-INFO (766-4463).

Rough Fire causing unhealthy air in Mountain Area

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By early Friday morning, the Rough Fire (near Hume Lake), which has been burning since July 31, had grown to more than 39,000 acres with 3% containment. Because of this wildfire, sparked by a lightning strike, unhealthy smoke has settled into the Mountain Area.

Dr. Mark Horton, director of the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), urges individuals to take steps to protect themselves against the combined danger posed by high heat and poor air quality.

“Children, the elderly and people with heart, circulation or breathing problems are especially vulnerable to both heat and smoke,” Horton said. “Individuals should regularly check on neighbors, particularly elders, and seek medical help if you see or experience signs of heat-related illness, including nausea, headache, vomiting, unusual fatigue or problems breathing.”

Air conditioning for those who have it can provide protection because it provides cool, filtered air. Residents who do not have air conditioning should visit friends or family member’s homes, a public place such as a library or shopping mall, or seek out a public cooling center.

Some precautions against smoke and heat-related illness are:

- * Lower body temperature by using cold compresses, misting and taking cool showers, baths or sponge baths.
- * Drink plenty of fluids. Don’t wait until you’re thirsty to drink. However, if your doctor has told you to limit the amount you drink or you are taking water pills, ask your doctor how much you should drink during the heat.
- * Avoid drinks with alcohol or large amounts of sugar, as these can promote dehydration.
- * Avoid physical exertion.
- * Wear lightweight and light-colored clothing.
- * Do not use bandanas (wet or dry), paper or surgical masks or tissues held over the mouth and nose. These will not protect your lungs from wildfire smoke.

More information about protecting yourself and others from the effects of excessive heat and wildfire smoke is available on the Be Prepared California website at bepreparedcalifornia.ca.gov, the California Department of Public Health website at cdph.ca.gov or the State Office of Emergency Services website at oes.ca.gov.

[Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star Editorial, Thursday, Aug. 20, 2015](#)

Our View: Smoke is ugly; invisible ozone is a greater danger

When you see something that looks like a bruise in the sky, it’s not a good sign.

But that’s how it looked Wednesday – yellowish, brown and thick – as smoke from the Tesla fire gathered in a huge cloud hanging low in the sky from Manteca to north Modesto. You could see it from Livingston and Oakdale.

What gives such a cloud its color is particulate matter, which, in high concentrations, makes it dangerous to breathe for many groups; the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued warnings to that effect for parts of San Joaquin County.

Thursday was different. The air above Modesto and Manteca had cleared a great deal by the afternoon (thank you, Delta breezes), but the fire that created the original cloud it isn’t out yet.

The Tesla fire had burned 2,500 acres of grassland on a ranch east of Livermore. It was only 25 percent contained as of Thursday. If the wind dies down, or shifts dramatically, that smoke could gather over us again.

“If you smell smoke,” said air board spokesperson Heather Heinks, “it’s having an impact and you’re breathing in particulate matter, in which case you should probably go indoors.”

It's easy to heed such common-sense advice.

It's harder, perhaps, when you can't see or smell the danger. But it's also more important to heed the warnings.

One of the nastiest components of our air is ozone, formed when organic compounds, including exhaust emissions from vehicles, begin to bake in the afternoon heat. It's nastier than the smoke and more dangerous to children when it enters their lungs – especially now, as school resumes.

“Our plea is ‘Turn the key; be idle-free,’” said Heinks. “When all those cars that were turned off for the summer are back and waiting in front of schools to pick up children, we see direct spikes” in ozone levels.

When the ozone levels go above 60, they are becoming dangerous. When they approach 100, the district issues warnings. No one should let children play outside when ozone levels are in that range. Generally, it occurs from 2 to 5 p.m. – just as many children are leaving school and eager to get outside.

For healthy kids, exposure to that level of ozone can lead to sore throats and wheezing. For kids with asthma, it can create difficulty breathing, make them dizzy and, in the worst cases, send them to the emergency room unable to draw breath. When ozone levels are that high, it's simply not safe to play outdoors.

That ugly smoke that bruised our sky this week is nasty, but the invisible stuff that we contribute to by running our motors to keep the inside of our cars cool is much, much worse. Like many bad things, you never see the dangerous stuff coming. Help your kids; turn off your car when waiting to pick them up from school.