

Wildfire blamed for unhealthy air in Northern San Joaquin Valley

By Ken Carlson

Modesto Bee, Thursday, July 28, 2016

The heat-related smog was bad enough, and then smoke from a wildfire in Monterey County made the air unhealthy this week in the Northern San Joaquin Valley.

In a cautionary statement Wednesday, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said the out-of-control wildfire is affecting the air in places throughout the valley. As of Wednesday afternoon, the Soberanes Fire had burned 23,600 acres and destroyed 20 homes between Carmel and Big Sur.

In addition, smoke from the Sand Fire in Los Angeles County was drifting into the southern part of the valley, creating unhealthy pollution in the Bakersfield area.

"We are definitely seeing an impact in Stanislaus and Merced counties, and not as much in San Joaquin County," said Anthony Pesto, an air district spokesman in Modesto.

In the three counties, the air quality was considered unhealthy for people with lung and heart diseases. The smoky conditions are expected to remain the same or worsen through the end of the weekend, Pesto said.

The triple-digit heat and stubborn high pressure over the region is trapping the smoke in the eight-county air basin. Air quality readings for particle levels and ozone are especially high in the afternoon hours, the district said.

Emissions from the wildfires are laden with ash and tiny particles. People breathing that can draw the particles deep into their lungs, exacerbating asthma, emphysema or chronic bronchitis. The pollutants also make people more susceptible to lung infections.

When those tiny particles are taken into the bloodstream, it raises the risk of heart attack and stroke, Pesto said.

According to the air district, people with respiratory illness, young children and the elderly are especially susceptible to the pollution. They are advised to stay indoors as much as possible.

Daily updates on local air quality and the wildfires are available on the air district's website at www.valleyair.org.

"Your eyes and nose are good tools to use," Pesto said. "If you can smell the smoke or see it, you are being impacted and should do something to remove yourself from the exposure."

To keep from adding to the pollution, the air district asked valley residents to drive less, refrain from idling their vehicles and postpone using gas-powered lawn mowers until the air clears.

Wildfires causing poor air quality in Valley

Porterville Recorder, Thursday, July 28, 2016

Due to the ongoing wildfires, the public is experiencing poor air quality and should take action to protect their health.

According to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, smoke from the Soberanes Fire burning in Monterey County is affecting air quality in locations throughout the San Joaquin Valley while smoke from the Sand Fire in Los Angeles County is affecting air quality in the southern Valley. Unusually high particulate matter and ozone levels throughout the valley are prompting air district officials to issue a health cautionary statement Valley-wide.

The wildfires burning around the Valley coupled with high heat and a strong high-pressure system parked over the Valley are causing smoke emissions to remain trapped within the air basin and spikes in particulate matter levels and ozone levels, particularly during the afternoon hours.

"The businesses and residents of the Valley have done so much to reduce summertime pollution that it is unfortunate when these wildfires overwhelm that great work," said Seyed Sadredin, the district's executive director and air pollution control officer. "However, the public needs to be advised that while

these fires burn and bring smoke into the valley, they need to take the appropriate steps to protect their health.”

Air officials are expecting these poor air quality conditions to continue into next week.

Smoke from wildfires produces particulate matter and contributes to the creation of ozone, which can cause serious health problems including lung disease, asthma attacks and increased risk of heart attacks and stroke.

People with existing respiratory conditions, young children and elderly people are especially susceptible to health effects from these pollutants. Air District officials urge residents to follow their doctors' orders when exposed to wildfire emissions and stay indoors if at all possible.

For more information, visit www.valleyair.org or call a district office in Fresno at 230-6000, Modesto at 209-557-6400 or Bakersfield at 661-381-1809.

Monterey, LA smoke over valley

Tracy Press, Thursday, July 28, 2016

The brown haze lingering in the sky over Tracy is smoke from wildfires burning in Monterey and Los Angeles counties, prompting a warning about poor air quality from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

In a Wednesday news release, the air district explained that smoke from the Soberanes Fire in Monterey County is spreading throughout the entire San Joaquin Valley, while the Sand Fire in Los Angeles County is affecting the southern half of the valley.

The smoke is trapped over the valley by the same strong high-pressure system that has caused temperatures to spike into the 100s.

Air district officials expect the smoke to remain into next week, based on weather reports and progress fighting the wildfires.

High particulate matter and ozone levels can cause health issues including lung disease, asthma attacks, increased risks of heart attack and strokes.

Young children, the elderly and people of all ages with respiratory ailments are most at risk and should remain indoors when possible.

Heat and smoke make for unhealthy air in the Valley

By Barbara Anderson

Fresno Bee, Tuesday, July 26, 2016

The heat continues this week, and so does the bad air in the central San Joaquin Valley.

Air quality on Thursday in Fresno is forecast to reach a “red” level for the second day in a row, which means unhealthy air for everyone.

And for much of the rest of the Valley, air quality is forecast to be only slightly better at an “orange” level – unhealthy for sensitive groups.

Children, the elderly, and people with asthma, other lung problems and heart conditions should try to stay inside, and anyone who has to be outdoors should avoid rigorous activities.

The biggest pollutant is ozone, which thrives on hot, stagnant air days in the Valley.

At 4 p.m. Wednesday, the temperature in Fresno was 108. The National Weather Service forecast for Thursday and Friday is highs of 107.

The Valley has had temperatures higher than 100 degrees since Saturday. And that isn't likely to change through next Wednesday. Saturday, the forecast high is 103 degrees, and highs of 102 are forecast on Monday and Tuesday. This would be an 11-day streak of blistering heat with temperatures in the triple digits.

That wouldn't be a record, though. The Valley had 21 days with temperatures higher than 100 degrees beginning on July 23, 2005, and ending on Aug. 12 of that year.

(Did you notice the beginning of the 2005 heat streak and the beginning of this one? Both started on July 23. Is it just a coincidence?) And will the heat and the bad air stick around to rival 11 years ago?

"I wouldn't jump to conclusions," said Christine Riley, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service office in Hanford.

As if the heat isn't enough, wildfires in Monterey and Los Angeles County continue to worsen the Valley's ozone-polluted air.

Smoke produces fine particulate matter, which can cause serious health problems, including lung disease, asthma attacks and increased risk for heart attacks and stroke.

The heat and a strong high pressure system are causing smoke to hang close to the ground.

"If you see smoke or smell smoke, stay inside in an air-conditioned environment," said Jaime Holt, chief communications officer at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

But ozone by itself is a bad pollutant.

It's sometimes described as a lung sunburn. Scientists know it causes inflammation in the lungs and kills cells.

Research shows that breathing ozone can, in the short term, cause shortness of breath and trigger asthma attacks. Long-term exposure – even at levels below a health alert – may cause scarring of the lungs, birth defects and other chronic health problems. It's been linked to early death.

But symptoms of the chemical burn can vary. One person may gasp for air and cough or rub stinging eyes. Another may feel little or no discomfort. And symptoms from breathing ozone also can lessen – and even stop – as exposure is repeated.

The disappearance of symptoms doesn't mean an individual has developed resistance to ozone, according to the federal Environmental Protection Agency. Ozone can continue to cause lung damage even when the symptoms have disappeared, the EPA says.

The most vulnerable to ozone are children, who breathe more air for their body weight than adults, and older people who can have health conditions that weaken their lungs and heart. But a healthy person exercising can breathe as much as 20 times more air than a person at rest. They also tend to breathe through their mouths, which bypasses the nose – the body's hair-lined air filter.

Dr. A.M. Aminian, a Fresno allergist, said people were running in the heat Monday. "They should not have been doing that," he said.

The doctor has seen more patients with asthma and other respiratory problems over the past two weeks. On the weekend, he had calls from patients in distress, he said. "A lot of people are having problems right now."

"Ozone is just really irritating to people's respiratory tracts," he said. "It creates just a feeling of dull aching in the chest, chest tightness."

People can monitor ozone levels by going to the air district website.

Ozone levels typically peak in the afternoon with the highest recorded between 3 and 6 p.m., Holt said. "Morning is the better choice for being outside, at least for this week that we're having right now."

Southern California Wildfires Affecting Valley Air Quality

By Kay Recede

KTXL Fox 40 News, Wednesday, July 27, 2016

CALIFORNIA -- The Soberanes and Sand Fires have charred thousands of acres and prompted evacuations throughout Monterey and Los Angeles counties.

The flames have impacted valley air quality.

Anthony Presto with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District told FOX40 that because of the triple-digit weather, strong pressure and the wildfires, smoke emissions can be trapped over the valley.

He's advising families to stay indoors in an air-conditioned controlled environment.

"If you see or smell smoke, you're likely being impacted, and that's really when you should basically take cover, go indoors. Because our monitoring stations although are very accurate, sometimes particles from wildfires might be too big for the instruments to pick up," Presto said.

Presto also advises drivers to not idle your car, the idea is to prevent even more pollutants from entering the air that we breathe.

Old Town Clovis cancels farmers market for first time in 27 years

By Rory Appleton

Fresno Bee, Thursday, July 28, 2016

For the first time in 27 years, Old Town Clovis will not host its summer farmers market this Friday evening.

Carole Lester, executive director of the Business Organization of Old Town, said sweltering temperatures and poor air quality led to the decision. The smaller Saturday market centered around the area of Fifth Street and Pollasky Avenue will happen as planned from 8-11:30 a.m.

"The police sent out a warning about the air, and we're hearing 111 or 112 degrees," Lester said. "The asphalt would make that between 115 and 120."

In addition, air quality tends to worsen later in the day.

The decision was made Wednesday because growers pick produce for the market on Thursdays, Lester said. The market typically runs from 5:30-9 p.m. every Friday between May and September.

Environmental leaders schedule meeting to discuss state's Climate Plan

By Cresencio Rodriguez-Delgado

Fresno Bee, Thursday, July 28, 2016

Environmental advocates and state representatives will meet Thursday to discuss the state's Climate Plan, which aims to reduce greenhouse gases by 40 percent by 2030.

The public meetings will take place at San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District offices in Fresno, Bakersfield and Modesto from 5:30 to 8 p.m.

The California Air Resources Board assisted the Environmental Justice Advisory Committee (EJAC), which consists of representatives from communities with significant air pollution, in organizing the meetings.

The office locations are:

Central Regional Office, Governing Board Room, 1990 E. Gettysburg Avenue, Fresno

Modesto Office, 4800 Enterprise Way, Modesto

Southern Region Office, 34946 Flyover Court, Bakersfield