

## **Cedar Fire smoke causing bad air quality in Fresno**

By Andrea Castillo

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Fresnans woke up to gray skies, the smell of smoke and falling ash Friday – products of the Cedar Fire in Kern County that overnight burned into Tulare County.

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials said the air quality in the region is bad and could get worse. They advised people to limit outdoor activity and follow doctors' orders.

The fire, which broke out Tuesday in Kern County north of Lake Isabella, had spread to 9,500 acres into Tulare County and was only 6 percent contained as of midday Friday, the U.S. Forest Service said.

Smoke produces fine particulate matter, known as PM 2.5, which can cause serious health problems, including lung disease, asthma attacks and increased risk for heart attacks and stroke.

Air district spokeswoman Jaime Holt said smoke from the Chimney Fire in San Luis Obispo County and the Soberanes Fire in Big Sur also is affecting the Valley's air quality. She said particulate matter levels are especially high in central Fresno, Hanford, Visalia, Parlier, Porterville and Clovis. Ash was visible – especially on cars – in many Valley locales.

Usually around this time of year, Fresno PM 2.5 stays below 10 micrograms per cubic meter. Holt said the monitor in central Fresno was showing 34 micrograms. At 35 micrograms, the air quality starts getting unhealthy for sensitive groups, she said. By 55 micrograms, the air district advises everyone to stay inside.

Holt said the air district's monitors are set up to record very fine particles that people can't see. But the monitors don't measure large particles, like ash. So, she said people who are seeing or smelling ash need to stay inside even if they are near a monitor that isn't recording higher levels of PM 2.5.

If the air quality worsens into next week, the district may advise schools to limit outdoor activity, Holt said.

"Right now the plume of smoke is going basically straight up over Porterville toward Fresno," she said.

"As the day warms up there's a chance the smoke will move higher up in the atmosphere. But as long as there's a fire burning there's a chance – depending on how the weather works with us – that it may get worse."

Holt said anyone wanting to go outdoors this weekend should go higher than the layer of smoke. That means possibly going as high as Lake Edison, which is at an elevation of more than 7,500 feet in eastern Fresno County.