

Fowler Unified honored for air program

Fresno Bee, Sunday, Oct. 2, 2016

Fowler Unified School District was honored for addressing students' exposure to unhealthy air. Fowler Unified uses the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's Healthy Air Living In Your School program to make informed decisions about outdoor activities based on air quality. The district also has addressed students' exposure to idling vehicles.

The honor was announced Sept. 27 at a news conference at Malaga Elementary School in Fresno attended by fourth-grade students and their parents.

Weekend air quality raises health concerns

By Monica Velez

Merced Sun-Star, Saturday, October 1, 2016

Winds expected this weekend in the Valley will raise the risk of poor air quality, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District,

"Residents should be aware that gusty winds during extremely dry conditions, like those we've been experiencing in the Valley, tend to bring with them blowing dust," Anthony Presto, outreach and communication specialist for the Valley Air District, said in an email to the Sun-Star.

Local air pollution officials issued health cautions for Friday afternoon through Monday due to dust that's expected in the air, resulting in unhealthy concentrations of particulate matter.

Particle pollution can be anything from dust to smoke and soot, according to Valley Air District officials, and can pose health problems by aggravating lung disease, triggering asthma attacks or bronchitis, and increasing the risk of respiratory infections.

"Dust is a form of particulate matter and can have adverse effects on the respiratory system," Presto said. "The more fine particles may even get into the bloodstream, increasing the risk of heart attacks and strokes."

Anybody with heart or lung disease should follow their doctor's advice, the Valley Air District said in a statement. Depending on local conditions, children and adults should avoid prolonged exposure to particle pollution.

According to the district's Real-Time Air Advisory Network, Merced's air over the past week has reached levels deemed unhealthy for "sensitive groups," such as children, seniors and anyone with respiratory problems.

"Residents should protect themselves by reducing their exposure during episodes of gusty winds and blowing dust," Presto said. "This can best be accomplished by retreating indoors until the wind and dust dies down."

Valley Air District officials advise residents to check air quality regularly at www.valleyair.org.

According to the National Weather Service, this weekend is expected to be mostly sunny, with a chance of rain Sunday.

Students learn RAAN = healthy breathing

By Jeff Benziger, staff writer

The Turlock Journal, Friday, Sept. 30, 2016

For the 71 students attending Joel Hidahl Elementary School with asthma, an internet website and smart phone app could mean the difference in breathing well or not at all.

At an assembly at the Ceres school last week, students were told how the RAAN, or the Real-Time Air Advisory Network, is helping to protect their health. The tool is offered to the public free of charge by the San Joaquin Valley Air District. It hourly reports air quality through a variety of monitoring stations located throughout the Valley. RAAN measures ozone and Fine Particulate Matter. If air quality is classified as bad, some people with health issues are advised to stay indoors.

RAAN is better than the air quality flags which some schools continue to fly to indicate forecasts for air quality on any given day.

"We are retiring that program in favor of schools using real time air pollution information which is much more health protective and accurate," said Presto.

The RAAN website is located online at Valleyair.org with the downloadable app.

Hidahl School Principal Vaughn Williams said his school keeps health-sensitive students indoors during recesses.

"On really bad days our P.E. teachers are instructed to keep students inside," said Williams. "Programs like this encourage schools to take action on bad quality. It makes the school proactive and avoids many children having asthma attacks on campus."

"We're trying to educate kids because they're our future," said Anthony Presto of the San Joaquin Valley Air District. "It's so important that they understand this issue of air pollution which affects everyone's health. One of the main issues is we want to reduce their exposure to air pollution and that's what Healthy Air Living Schools sets out to do."

The assembly presented things that can be done to help prevent pollution by giving the message to parents to:

- Not idle the car engine during pickup at school;
- Switch to a hybrid or electric car;
- Use a rake or electric lawnmower;
- Barbecue with propane or natural gas;
- Drive less.

Presto said the district seeks to educate young people because "they're going to be consumers buying electric vehicles, they're going to be city council and county supervisors passing ordinances, and maybe managers of businesses that encourage employees to carpool. Educating them now about how important this is, is going to lead them on a path to make a bigger difference than is being made today. We are always looking for different ways and more ways to clean our valley's air."

The Healthy Air Living Schools program is not brand-new, said Presto, but is slowly making its rounds to the 5,000 schools throughout the eight-county area covered by the district.

The event helped to plug the annual Healthy Air Living Kids Calendar contest with its Oct. 3 entry deadline.