

Large stack of hay burns in Fresno; no injuries reported

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FRESNO, Calif. - Tons of burning hay sent flames and smoke into the air in Central California early Tuesday prompting a health warning, authorities said.

More than 420 tons (381 metric tons) of hay caught on fire before midnight Monday at a ranch in Fresno County, said Capt. Jeremiah Wittwer of the Fresno County Fire Protection District. The hay is continuing to burn.

No one was injured, authorities said.

A structure covering the hay was destroyed, Wittwer said. He did not have a damage estimate, and the cause of the fire has not been determined, Wittwer said.

Firefighters worked to prevent the flames from spreading to other buildings, and no nearby structures had burned, authorities said.

Early Tuesday morning, firefighters left the burning hay to the owner. Wittwer said the owner was expected to bring in heavy equipment to spread out the hay and douse it with water.

Residents who see or smell the smoke should take caution, warned the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, which says that smoke can lead to serious health problems in sensitive groups.

Hay fire south of Fresno expected to continue burning through Tuesday

By Jim Guy

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A 420-ton alfalfa fire burning south of Fresno is expected to continue spewing smoke into the air through Tuesday, according to Fresno County Fire Capt. Jeremiah Wittwer.

The smoke prompted the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District in Fresno to issue a cautionary statement, warning residents that if smoke can be seen or smelled, it can be a hazard.

The fire erupted just before midnight Tuesday near the intersection of South Cherry and East North avenues. Wittwer said firefighters are being assisted by the owners of the crop in controlling the blaze.

Heavy equipment is being used to break up the smoldering hay. Fully dousing the flames is not an option due to limited water resources.

Fire investigators have not established how the fire started, but Wittwer said spontaneous combustion of the hay was a possibility, as was arson.

The amount of damage to the crop was being assessed. In addition, a \$15,000 barn was destroyed.

The air pollution statement said that smoke from fires produces fine-particulate matter which can cause serious health problems, including lung disease, asthma attacks and increased risk of heart attacks or stroke.

The Real-time air Advisory Network provides more information at www.valleyair.org/RAAN.