

## **Air quality in Merced County is getting worse. Officials say it might be your fault.**

By Monica Velez

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Air quality in Merced County consistently reached unhealthy levels in recent days and it's "most likely" because of Valley residents and emissions coming from other areas, San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials say.

Since Friday, air quality in the county has either been unhealthy for sensitive groups, like people with respiratory problems, or considered unhealthy for everyone, according to the district's Real-Time Air Advisory Network.

"We're experiencing very stagnant conditions and a high pressure system which holds emissions down at grown level," said Anthony Presto, outreach and communication representative for the district. "It is more likely that a majority of our current particulate matter pollution is being generated from activities by Valley residents, at this time."

Residential wood burning is the largest source of particulate matter during winter months, according to Valley Air District officials, and can pump 17 tons of particulate matter daily into the air.

Emissions from cars and trucks also has a year-round impact on Valley air, Presto said.

To clear up the air, Presto said, it's going to take "significant winds" and a storm with both wind and rain would be "ideal."

The district's winter program, Check Before You Burn, lasts through February, and is designed to reduce the amount of unhealthy emissions in Central Valley air by restricting the use of wood-burning devices. People to register their wood-burning devices at [www.valleyair.org/CBYBregistration](http://www.valleyair.org/CBYBregistration).

To look at daily wood-burning statuses go to [www.valleyair.org/CBYB](http://www.valleyair.org/CBYB) or call 1-800-SMOG INFO (766-4463).

To see air quality updates people can go to [www.valleyair.org/RAAN](http://www.valleyair.org/RAAN).