

Itchy eyes, scratchy throat? Blame the air

By Barbara Anderson

Fresno Bee, Thursday, December 28, 2017

The gray air that is hanging over the central San Joaquin Valley is unfit to breathe.

Air pollution on Wednesday reached levels high enough to cause a ban on wood burning for the day and evening from Fresno south to Bakersfield.

Air quality on Thursday is expected to be unhealthy for everyone in Kings County, where burning will be banned again. In Madera, Fresno, Tulare and Kern counties wood burning will be allowed Thursday, but only with the use of clean-burning devices that are registered with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

"This is definitely the first day in wood-burning season that we've had no wood burning for all from Fresno south to Kern County," Heather Heinks, a spokeswoman at the air district, said Wednesday.

The daylong burning ban applies to burning wood and pellets in unregistered and registered residential stoves and inserts, as well as burning wood, pellets, manufactured logs in fireplaces or outdoor fire pits and chimneys.

Staying indoors and curtailing outdoor activities is also recommended, Heinks said. "On a day like today, when it lingers in the unhealthy category, generally across the board the public needs to keep an eye on how much they exert themselves."

Particles that are too tiny to be seen by the naked eye can irritate lungs, especially in people who have asthma and other respiratory conditions. Over time, exposure to particulate pollution can cause serious health problems. And in the short-term, breathing nasty air can trigger asthma attacks and increase the risk for respiratory infections.

At Sky Park Pediatrics in Fresno, Dr. Mary Howard said she had four or five appointments in the afternoon with patients who had coughs. "It's challenging, because we want children to be active and play," she said. "But they can't because their asthma reacts so quickly" to air pollution, she said.

Tabitha Johnston's youngest son was one of the coughing kids at the pediatric clinic on Wednesday afternoon. Johnston of Clovis said her son had never had a breathing problem until Christmas. She sent the 5-year-old outside to play, and "he'd come in just hacking up a lung," she said. "Now we have a complete airway restriction that we have to use an inhaler because of this air quality issue."

Johnston and an older son have asthma and they control it with medication. Johnston also monitors the air quality through an app on her cellphone that notifies her when the quality is poor, but her youngest son had never had a problem until this week.

The air control district provides the [RAAN alert](#) so people can see when the air is conducive for outdoor activity. Heinks said people are encouraged to keep an eye on the air quality so they can adjust their level of outdoor activity.

With the forecast for poor air quality the remainder of this week, Heinks said people can help by idling cars less and by heeding the wood-burning restriction.

Doctor to Fresno officials: If we cannot breathe, nothing else matters

By Dr. Praveen Buddiga

Fresno Bee, Wednesday, December 20, 2017

The Fresno region, and much of the Valley, ranks among the worst air quality in the nation. In the most recent State of the Air report from the American Lung Association, Fresno ranked third worst for ozone, or smog pollution, and particle pollution, largely caused by vehicle traffic and freight.

California has some of the strongest policies in the country to reduce vehicle emissions through both zero-emission vehicles and clean fuels. Those policies are an important tool to decrease vehicle emissions, but we need more tools to solve the problem. We must address the fundamental changes that need to happen in our state's land use planning and transportation system decisions.

To clean the air and improve health we must change the way we have designed our neighborhoods for decades.

We have placed the focus on sprawl that leads to increased traffic and air pollution while reducing the ability for residents to walk, bike or share a ride for even the simplest of errands. It is time we make regional planning decisions based on public health and reduced air pollution.

Last week the California Air Resources Board started the process to update regional climate targets for 2020 and 2035, focused on reducing emissions through land-use and transportation decisions.

These targets, originally established by state legislation in 2008, will guide community-planning decisions in Fresno and beyond to limit air pollution from vehicles. For public health, it is critical the Air Board pass the strongest targets to continue efforts to reduce air pollution.

Breathing unhealthy air can affect everything from birth weight to school performance, and it can lead to an increased risk for a lifetime of lung disease. Air pollution is connected to increased asthma rates, emergency room visits and hospitalizations, and even premature death.

The San Joaquin Valley is one giant basin, which naturally traps air pollution. We can't change our geography, but we can urge regional planners to consider public health when designing neighborhoods and transportation systems for easy access to schools, work, entertainment and shopping.

The regional climate targets set by Senate Bill 375 in 2008 are already working to better align community planning with state goals to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions. Our state and local leaders must now accelerate the progress to achieve California's bold vision for climate action and healthier communities.

Local governments especially should take advantage of state financial resources now available to them to build healthier communities. California's Climate Investment Program, funded through cap and trade funds, combined with other state funding, is available to support sustainable, healthy community planning, transit, active transportation and more.

One key example of this is the Transformative Climate Communities grant program that will invest \$70 million into Fresno communities in the next year, with pending proposals for energy efficiency, solar and urban greening projects in Southwest Fresno worthy of state funding. We can build on the success of our community voices and build a healthier Fresno for everyone.

I join with physicians from around the state to urge the California Air Resources Board to make health improvement the top priority and adopt the strongest possible regional climate targets together with other strategies to reduce vehicle dependence.

I call on our local government officials to take advantage of those climate funds now available to make our communities healthier and reduce air pollution. We must continue to do everything we can to fight for clean air in our region. Because if we can't breathe, nothing else matters.