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Attn: Local news, weather, health and assignment editors

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It's official: Wildfire season has begun for the Valley

District cautions Valley residents to be prepared for smoke impacts from wildfires

The Walker fire in Calaveras County has marked the beginning of wildfire season in the San Joaquin Valley. While full containment of the Walker fire is expected within coming days, with minimal smoke impacts in our region, air pollution officials will continue to monitor the situation and caution Valley residents to be prepared for smoke impacts from other fires this season.

A build-up of dry vegetation during the hot summer months presents a high risk for hotter, faster moving fires in mountain communities surrounding the Valley, often sending smoke into the San Joaquin Valley.

Wildfire smoke contains particulate matter (PM), which can trigger asthma attacks, aggravate chronic bronchitis, and increase the risk of heart attack and stroke. Individuals with heart or lung disease should follow their doctors' advice for dealing with episodes of PM exposure. Those with existing respiratory conditions, including COVID-19, young children and the elderly, are especially susceptible to the negative health effects from this form of pollution. Anyone experiencing poor air quality due to wildfire smoke should move indoors, to a filtered, air-conditioned environment with windows closed and contact their primary care provider for more information.

The District also cautions residents that basic cloth or paper face masks often used for COVID-19 protection do not provide adequate protection from fine particulate matter. For those choosing to protective wear face masks as smoke protection, this professional guidance is provided:

https://www3.epa.gov/airnow/smoke_fires/respiratory-protection-508.pdf.

Residents can use the District's Real-time Air Advisory Network (RAAN) to track air quality at any Valley location by visiting myRAAN.com. District air monitoring stations are designed to detect microscopic PM 2.5 particles that exist in smoke. However, larger particles, such as ash, may not be detected. If you smell smoke, or see smoke or falling ash in your immediate vicinity, consider air quality "unhealthy" (RAAN Level 4 or higher) even if RAAN displays a lower level of pollution.

The public can also check the District's wildfire page at www.valleyair.org/wildfires for information about any current wildfires affecting the Valley. In addition, anyone can follow air quality conditions by downloading the free "Valley Air" app on their mobile device.

For more information, visit www.valleyair.org or call a District office in Fresno (559-230-6000), Modesto (209-557-6400) or Bakersfield (661-392-5500). District Outreach and Communications personnel are also available for media interviews via Zoom or by phone.