

Valley Air District shines in audit

The Madera Tribune Monday, August 31, 2009

The Valley Air District accomplishes more with fewer people and at a lower cost than other air districts in the state, according to a recent study that compared California's air quality management agencies.

Bill Sylte, a partner with the Sierra Nevada Air Quality Group, the environmental consulting firm that conducted the study, presented the results to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's governing board at a public hearing last week. A summary of the report can be found at www.valleyair.org.

The audit was funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation for the Central Valley Air Quality Coalition, a partnership of more than 70 environmental organizations in the valley. The study evaluated the district's performance compared to several other air districts in the state using benchmarks established by the study's authors.

"The bottom line is, you did well," Sylte told the district governing board.

Note: The above article was shortened from its published form in The Madera Tribune newspaper.

City vows emissions cuts

By The Record

Stockton Record, Wednesday, Sept. 2, 2009

STOCKTON - The City Council said Tuesday that Stockton will try by 2020 to cut greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels, reducing emissions by about 28.7 percent from levels otherwise projected for 2020.

The reduction target - an interim measure to be in place until Stockton approves a comprehensive plan for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, likely next year - is to be used as a benchmark when reviewing development plans.

The reduction target's 7-0 adoption Tuesday was in response to the city's landmark, growth-limiting settlement last year with state Attorney General Jerry Brown and the Sierra Club over Stockton's growth-governing General Plan. The settlement required Stockton to reduce growth's impact on the environment.

EPA designation could hurt farmers

By Alex Cantatore

Turlock Journal, Wednesday, Sept. 2, 2009

Local dairymen will likely see an increase in the costs of doing business due to a proposed redesignation of the San Joaquin Valley under U.S. Environmental Protection Agency rules.

Between 600 and 700 Valley farming operations and dairies will be subject to new permitting requirements, rules, and regulations as a result of the EPA's move to reclassify the region's ozone levels from "serious" to the heightened level of "extreme," according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The threshold for a farm to be considered a "major" pollution source — those required to obtain permits — was previously set at 25 tons of nitrogen or volatile organic compound emissions. That level will be lowered to 10 tons of emissions in September, should the EPA move forward with their plans.

"Administrative costs are not a big part of the problem; our permits have some of lowest fees of any district," said Seyed Sadredin, San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District executive director. "The real cost is the regulations that come along with having a permit."

In real-world terms, a dairy would previously need approximately 1,000 cows to trigger the requirement for air pollution permitting. Now, dairies with less than 500 cows would be required to install costly emissions control technology, subject to federal requirements.

Expansion and modification of existing “major polluter” dairies would become more costly and complicated as well, triggering additional emissions control requirements.

Dairies and other large employers could also be subject to a new air district rule intended to reduce employee trips to work.

All employers with more than 100 employees would be required to put into place educational programs, incentives, and disincentives to encourage employees to move away from single occupancy vehicles. Instead, carpooling, bike riding, and vanpools are to be encouraged.

The reclassification of the San Joaquin Valley’s ozone levels would come as a condition of a much-needed 11-year extension to the Air District’s deadline to clean the air of ozone.

The Federal government previously imposed a Clean Air Act mandated 2013 deadline to reduce Valley ozone concentrations to acceptable levels. In 2007, the Air District determined that meeting the 2013 deadline was unfeasible, and the State of California requested an extension from the Federal government.

“Given the Valley’s challenges and the reductions we need to make to meet the federal standard, at that time we could not identify ways to meet the deadline,” Sadredin said. “... Obviously, it’s not a free extension that they give you; it comes with some requirements.”

The EPA is expected to grant the extension — and impose the requirements — in September.

The deadline of 2013 was established in 2004, when it was determined the San Joaquin Valley was in nonattainment for the 1997 8-hour ozone national ambient air quality standard.

Ozone is a dangerous gas created by a chemical reaction between volatile organic compounds and nitrogen oxides in the presence of sunlight. In order for the Valley to meet Federal requirements, nitrogen oxide emissions must be reduced an additional 75 percent from current levels.

The Valley was forced into the “extreme” ozone designation as no avenues have been identified to reduce emissions to a point where attainment can be reached. According to Air District projections, no existing or in development technologies will allow the Valley to reduce ozone concentrations to acceptable levels, even by the 2024 deadline.

“We still need additional advances in technology, and we’re hoping before we get to 2024 the technology will be there for us to get there,” Sadredin said.

Smoke from SoCal fires lowers air quality in the Valley

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Wednesday, Sept. 2, 2009

Smoke from the fires in Los Angeles County is making its way into the Central Valley today, lowering air quality to the ‘unhealthy for sensitive groups’ range.

The air quality index for today is 101.

Later this week a low pressure center from the Pacific Northwest is expected to push into Central California bringing down temperatures and possibly helping to drive some of the smoke out of the Valley.

Bad air quality leads to PCC postponement

By Keith Lair, Staff Writer

L.A. Daily News, Wednesday, Sept. 2, 2009

The Pasadena City College women's soccer team's home opener has been postponed. Poor air quality caused by the Station Fire led to the cancellation of today's nonconference game against Chula Vista's Southwestern, Lancers head coach Cherif Zein said.

"It's tough, very, very tough," Zein said. "They were all prepared to go, but how can they when some of the girls have been evacuated and cannot even go home right now?"

An abbreviated team lost to host San Bernardino Valley 10-0 on Monday in temperatures that reached 106 degrees. Because of school enrollment issues, which were expected to have been resolved by today's scheduled game, only 11 Lancers were on the field. The Lancers did not have a goalie or any midfielders available.

Friday's home game against L.A. Valley College is also in doubt. The Lancers' men's next game, and home opener, is Tuesday against Mission.

Weather helping fight against massive LA blaze

By Raquel Maria Dillon, The Associated Press
In the Hanford Sentinel, Wednesday, Sept. 2, 2009

Firefighters made more progress Wednesday against a giant wildfire that has ravaged a national forest north of Los Angeles, with another day of cooperative weather providing a big assist to beleaguered fire crews.

The blaze in the Angeles National Forest had burned nearly 219 square miles, or 140,150 acres, by early Wednesday. Firefighters have created a perimeter around 22 percent of the blaze, largely by removing brush with bulldozers and setting controlled burns. Bulldozers still have 95 miles of fire line to build.

"The crews are making excellent progress based on the improved weather conditions," U.S. Forest Service incident commander Mike Dietrich at a Wednesday news conference.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger planned to visit the fire area Wednesday morning. Since erupting Aug. 26, the blaze has destroyed more than five dozen homes, killed two firefighters and forced thousands of people from their homes. The cause was still not known.

Officials also were keeping a close eye on the wind, which had been calm overnight but could pick up Wednesday afternoon and move flames closer to homes and a historic observatory. Mount Wilson is currently strongly defended.

U.S. Forest Service incident commander Mike Dietrich was not willing to say a corner had been turned.

In a hillside neighborhood of Glendale, Frank Virgallito stood in a group anxiously watching a controlled burn edge toward their neighborhood.

Virgallito said he and his neighbors had been on high alert since Friday but ignored a voluntary evacuation.

"You don't sleep well," Virgallito said. "I get up every hour and a half or two hours to get a good view of where the fire is. For four days we've been a little sleep-deprived. It's unnerving."

Virgallito said he saw deer, coyote and skunks scampering down his street away from the heat and ash of the smoldering wilderness.

Officials also worried about the threat to a historic observatory and TV, radio and other antennas on Mount Wilson northeast of Los Angeles. But on Tuesday, firefighters set backfires near the facilities before a giant World War II-era seaplane-turned-air tanker made a huge water drop on flames inching toward the peak from the north and west.

By nightfall, 150 firefighters and engines were stationed at the peak to defend the towers, said fire spokesman Paul Lowenthal.

The flames crossed the Angeles Crest Highway into the San Gabriel Wilderness to the east on Tuesday, Lowenthal said. Firefighters made progress on fire breaks to the north near Acton and southwest from Altadena to the Sunland neighborhood.

Firefighters and longtime residents know it could be so much worse. Autumn is the season for the ferocious Santa Ana winds to sweep in from the northeastern deserts, gaining speed through narrow mountain canyons, sapping moisture from vegetation and pushing flames farther out into the suburbs.

"If we had Santa Anas, we still have all this open land here on the western flank and islands of vegetation would throw embers into the air, which would blow down to the homes," Fire spokesman Henry Martinez said, his voice trailing off as he imagined the worst-case scenario. "Let's hope that doesn't happen."

The wildfire season usually doesn't gather steam until the winds hit in October, but the Station fire has been driven by dryness instead of wind. The region is in the midst of a three-year drought, and the tinder-dry forest is ripe for an explosive fire.

Fire officials said 12,000 homes were threatened, but as evacuations are lifted, that number will likely fall.

Smoke billowed thousands of feet up in the air, forming what firefighters call an "ice cap," which dissipated and was pushed east for at least 800 miles.

In Colorado, smoke from the Station Fire combined with soot from local fires to block mountain views from Denver.

"That really speaks to the columns of smoke and how much burning was going on," said Norv Larson, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Grand Junction, Colo.

"I've put haze in the forecast. I don't see it ending anytime soon," Larson said. "We've got our fires here, you've got your fires there."

Flames charred other parts of Southern California, including one that burned at least 1.5 square miles in the San Bernardino County community of Oak Glen and another that threatened 400 homes in Yucaipa and was at 70 percent containment.

"There's action everywhere," Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger said as a helicopter interrupted his comments at a news conference in San Bernardino County.

Lance Williams, 49, managed to save his aunt's home in Delta Flats, a remote community tucked in a canyon in the Angeles National Forest, but returned Tuesday to find his neighbors' homes in ashes.

"It looked like hell," Williams said. "The fire was creating its own winds. There was no way of predicting which way it would go."

He said he used a water pump to fight off the firestorm that raced down hillsides into the canyon. By the time he ran out of water, fire crews had arrived to defend the home that had been in his family since 1945.

Near the remains of house, the charred frames of animal cages swayed in a light wind. In one of the cages, the remains of three small dogs were found.

The massive fire also took a toll on firefighters who bunk down each night in tents at the huge fire command center. Glendale firefighter-paramedic Jack Hayes, 31, said he had not taken a day off for a week.

"You can't sleep," said Hayes, who had the beginnings of a beard and bloodshot eyes. "You're ready to go and there's always something you could be doing."

Two firefighters -- Capt. Tedmund Hall, 47, of San Bernardino and firefighter Specialist Arnaldo "Arnie" Quinones, 35, of Palmdale -- were killed Sunday when their vehicle plummeted off a mountain road. Quinones' wife is expecting a child soon, and Hall had a wife and two adult children.

Associated Press writers Greg Risling, Thomas Watkins, Daisy Nguyen and Jacob Adelman in Los Angeles contributed to this report.

Air quality could postpone games

L.A. Daily News, Wednesday, Sept. 2, 2009

Poor air quality from the wildfires in the San Bernardino and Angeles National Forest areas have altered practice sessions for many local teams.

At Yucaipa High School, smoke from the Oak Glen III fire forced the cancellation of school.

Many schools resorted to going inside for practice while others that did go outside curtailed the level of activity.

At this point, no games scheduled for Thursday or Friday have been postponed or canceled.

"We are using the South Coast AQMD report and we are in contact with them in person," Upland athletic director Jim Drake stated in an e-mail to his district. "We will not take any chances with the health of our players or fans.

"We have had to do this in the past, October of 2003, so rest assured we have a system in place to deal with this type of occurrence."

Upland has a freshman game scheduled for 3:15 p.m. Thursday against Miller and a 7 p.m. Friday game.

"We will make a decision about Thursday on Thursday mid-morning and Friday we will make the call later in the day after 2 p.m.," Drake said. He noted UCLA and San Diego State have set today as the decision day for Saturday's game at the Rose Bowl, but there are different circumstances at the high school level.

"Since we are not traveling great distances for these games, we will wait until the day of the game to make these decisions," Drake said. "They need to do that because of the distances people are traveling and reservations that may need to be changed.

"We, fortunately, don't have those limitations so we can afford to wait until the day of the game."

First rankings

Rancho Cucamonga and Diamond Ranch are atop the ranking in the Central and Southeast divisions, respectively, in the annual CIF-SS preseason poll.

Rancho Cucamonga is the favorite to defend its Central title. The Baseline League Cougars are followed by Chino Hills of the Sierra League and a pair of San Andreas schools, Colton and Cajon. Glendora of the Sierra rounds out the top 5.

Calif. wildfire smoke prompts air warning in Vegas

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times, Modesto Bee and other papers, Tuesday, Sept. 1, 2009

LAS VEGAS—Clark County officials have extended a poor air quality advisory through Wednesday due to smoke and ozone from California wildfires wafting into the Las Vegas area.

The county Department of Air Quality and Environmental Management is advising people with heart and respiratory ailments to stay indoors to avoid breathing fine dust particles and soot.

Officials say the same precautions should be taken by children and the elderly.

The county's air quality forecast is for smoke from the Southern California fires to continue to drift more than 250 miles into Clark County for the next several days.

Officials say ozone and particulate levels were monitored in the moderate range on Monday.

Game status up in the air, where there's lots of smoke

By Tim Sullivan, Columnist

San Diego Union-Tribune, Wednesday, Sept. 2, 2009

Breathe a little bit easier, Aztecs fans. Air quality was officially tolerable, at least for a time, yesterday at the Rose Bowl. The Brady Hoke Era may still start on schedule.

California's latest mega-fire stretched as many as 25 miles wide yesterday afternoon, pursuing its devastating scorched-earth policy primarily in an easterly direction.

So far, Pasadena has been spared. So far, Saturday's San Diego State-UCLA college football opener is still on.

So far.

Remember, though, that natural disasters do not run their course for our convenience and that neither the Aztecs nor the Bruins have a game scheduled for Saturday, Dec. 5. Remember, too, that where there's smoke, there is also a lot of microscopic "particulate matter" that the federal government generally frowns upon.

A portable monitor placed at the Rose Bowl on Monday night detected those problem particulate matters registered a level of 24 micrograms per cubic meter yesterday afternoon. Because the Environmental Protection Agency's health standard is 35 micrograms per cubic meter, the reading was well within the acceptable range.

That, however, was yesterday, and the massive fire was still a long way from extinguished.

"This fire is the size of the city of San Francisco," said Lisa Derderian, public information officer for the Pasadena Fire Department. "It kind of has a personality of its own."

"Personally, I am optimistic (about Saturday's game), but we were optimistic late last week that the fires would be more contained, too."

The advisability of the Bruins and Aztecs banging helmets in the Arroyo Seco will be discussed during a 2 p.m. conference call today involving representatives of the Pasadena Fire Department, the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD), Los Angeles County and Pasadena health officers and a meteorologist.

SDSU Athletic Director Jeff Schemmel said yesterday he would defer to UCLA's judgment on whether the game should be played. UCLA, in turn, will surely lean on the expertise of public health experts rather than expose players and fans to hazardous conditions and itself to class-action liability.

The situation is so fluid that between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. yesterday, the air quality index for the West San Gabriel Valley (including Pasadena) fluctuated from "unhealthy" to "moderate" back to "unhealthy" according to the SCAQMD's Web site.

"If I was wanting to protect the health of the players and the fans, I don't see any evidence that the air is going to greatly improve between now and Saturday," said Bill Brick, senior meteorologist for the San Diego County Air Pollution Control District. "And it could very well get worse. . . ."

"When we get up to the unhealthy-for-everybody range, that means everybody. The players are going to be breathing hard. If you think about who had the most problems after 9/11, it was the firefighters who were breathing that stuff."

Brick suggested moving the game to Qualcomm Stadium. Given the logistical complexities, the financial considerations and their home-field advantage, the Bruins would plainly prefer to change the date rather than location. UCLA spokesman Marc Dellins called himself "cautiously optimistic" yesterday afternoon, then called back a minute later to delete "cautiously" from his characterization.

"At this point, we'd not be looking to play it somewhere else," Dellins said.

At this point, so much of Southern California has contracted fire fatigue that it's easy to sympathize with those who choose to stand their ground rather than comply with another precautionary evacuation. Still, it's incumbent on those entrusted with the general good to err on the side of safety.

If that means no football this Saturday, we'll have all we can stand of it it soon enough. Two years ago, under similar circumstances, the Aztecs moved their BYU game from October to December and played it before their second-biggest home crowd of the season.

Luke Laolagi has learned the drill in detail. The Aztecs' senior linebacker grew up in Reseda, and figures his house is a "five-minute drive" from yesterday's fire perimeter. As a senior at Birmingham High School in Van Nuys, Laolagi twice had Friday games moved on account of fire.

"I remember during practice, the air quality wasn't great," Laolagi said. "We kind of adjusted our practices, made them a little bit shorter."

If the Aztecs are adjusting their preparations for UCLA in anticipation of breathing difficulties, it may not be by much. Hoke's intention is to substitute extensively, particularly on defense, to combat the Bruins' superior size with fresher legs.

Hoke said he is leaving the larger question — whether to play at all — for others to deliberate. His input, he predicted, would be “none.”

“We're preparing to play Saturday,” Laolagi said. “That's all we can control.”

When it comes to wildfire, there is no control. One can only hope to contain it.

Napa bus will have engine similar to Prius'

Kelly Zito, Chronicle Staff Writer

San Francisco Chronicle Wed., Sept. 2, 2009

Kids in Napa won't hear the usual "clackety clack" of a diesel engine when district bus HY-2 lumbers up to their stop next month.

In fact, when the bus is sitting still, they won't hear anything at all.

Within a week or two, Napa Valley Unified School District will premiere one of the first small hybrid buses in the nation, thanks to state grants aimed at curbing school bus emissions and a transportation manager's aggressive campaign to green his fleet.

"I just got tired of seeing the commercials with the big puff of black smoke coming out of the tailpipe of school buses," said Ralph Knight, transportation supervisor for the 17,000-student school district.

Bus HY-2 is technically the second hybrid the district owns, but it is the first in California to use an engine similar to that of the Toyota Prius, which relies on both gasoline and electricity. The bus, which will carry children with special needs, will get an estimated 15 miles to the gallon, up from about 10 miles.

The district's first hybrid, a standard-size plug-in, was purchased in 2007 - the first, and until now, the only other hybrid school bus in use in California, according to state air regulators. It was one of only a handful produced through the work of a North Carolina nonprofit that promotes sustainable energy.

Officials at Collins Bus Corp., the South Hutchinson, Kan., firm that made HY-2, hope to find a broader audience for their hybrid.

"This is a great application for schools," said John Doswell, vice president of sales and marketing at Collins. "Most of these buses sit in line waiting to pick up the kids at the end of the day, and they're belching fumes. These don't run while they're stopped at all."

Still, with a price tag of more than \$140,000, the Collins bus isn't affordable to most California school districts, which are facing steep cuts to transportation budgets as part of the state's effort close a gaping budget hole. Knight said a conventional small bus costs almost half that of HY-2 - about \$76,000.

That's where California policymakers seem to be at cross-purposes, according to school transportation officials. Amid the cutbacks, school districts are also required to replace or retrofit many of their diesel buses by 2018 as part of the state's sweeping plan to reduce school bus pollution and to slash overall carbon emissions to 1990 levels by 2020.

Studies by the California Air Resources Board show that while traveling in buses with windows closed, children are exposed to pollution at significantly higher levels than in the air surrounding the bus.

"Frankly, you'd see a lot more hybrid buses, but school districts are having a hard time putting any bus on the road at this point," said Ron Kinney, executive secretary for the California School Transportation Association in Sacramento. "What Ralph has been able to put together is pretty rare."

Knight, whose fleet also includes more than 30 buses that run on compressed natural gas, is thankful some state bond money for bus purchases still remains (local and state grants effectively paid for the HY-2). In 2006, Californians voted to spend \$200 million to upgrade and swap out older diesel buses. So far, \$83 million has been disbursed; officials are waiting for sale of additional bonds to fund the rest.

"If it wasn't for the grant money, we wouldn't be able to do this," Knight said.

Not one to stop there, Knight is now talking with Ford about developing a car for the school district that would be powered by a fuel cell, a device that uses an electrochemical reaction. Typical hydrogen fuel cells give off not carbon dioxide but water vapor.

"You have to dig and dig and turn over rocks to make this happen," Knight said.

[LA Times Editorial Tues. Sept. 1, 2009:](#)

Learning to live with wildfires

The fiery eruptions are part of California's natural landscape -- but there are ways to reduce the devastating effects.

Was the still air a blessing or a curse? The dearth of breeze kept the Station fire from burning even more disastrously out of control at the same time that it corralled ash and heat, making for miserable air quality. Most tellingly, though, it was a sign, just one of many, that the length and severity of wildfire seasons are worsening.

The worst fires typically occur around October, when Santa Ana winds and brush that has been drying in the hot sun since April combine to fuel deadly blazes. Yet the fire in the Angeles National Forest has consumed more than 105,000 acres without a gust to be felt. That is in good part because of the exceptional dryness of the vegetation after years of drought.

If it weren't for the evacuations and the lives and buildings lost, this would be considered one of the more environmentally acceptable fires. Southern California's scrub and chaparral depend on an occasional burning. Many plants, in fact, are "fire followers" that evolved to sprout up after a conflagration; fire clears areas for growth and deposits fertilizer. This area in the San Gabriel Mountains hasn't burned for 40 to 60 years, which is in sync with the natural fire cycle for the region; more frequent fires damage open land by not allowing native plants to mature while giving invasive annual plants a chance to take over.

In recent years, though, truly catastrophic brush fires have occurred even shortly after the rainy season ends in early spring. Years of low precipitation have brought progressively drier brush; research indicates that this is a result of climate change. Construction adjacent to open lands has led to attempts to stop all wildfires, allowing dense growth to build up and exacerbating the dollar and human damage from those that occur. Grazing livestock and human activities have given non-native plants, especially annual grasses, the opportunity to dominate wild landscapes. These cover more extensive patches of ground and dry earlier.

Even if the predicted El Niño conditions arrive this winter, the blessing will be mixed. Heavier rains lead to lush growth -- which then turns into a bumper crop of fire fuel.

It's hard to win against something as natural to the area as wildfire without dominating -- and further damaging -- wild lands. But we can reduce fire's harm by severely limiting sprawl into remote areas; regularly clearing near buildings and creating fire buffers along roads and between open lands and inhabited areas; and restoring habitat to a more natural state that provides less fuel. Fire is inevitable; our challenge is learning to live with it.

[O.C. Register blog, Tuesday, Sept. 1, 2009:](#)

UCLA-San Diego State decision expected Wednesday

posted by Al Balderas, staff writer

Pasadena officials could make a decision as early as Wednesday on whether to postpone or cancel Saturday's UCLA-San Diego State game at the Rose Bowl.

The air quality, because of the forest fires in the vicinity of the Rose Bowl, is the chief concern.

"Those decisions are out of our hands," Bruins coach Rick Neuheisel said. "We trust the experts to that stuff and we'll adhere to whatever comes.

"We're getting ready as if the game is going to proceed but at the same time we're sensitive to all of the families impacted with their homes and our best wishes to the people fighting the fire."

The Bruins don't have any plans to move the game to a different venue.

"The only thing I heard is that it would be postponed," Neuheisel said. "We would not change the venue."

The only open date on the schedule that would suit both teams is Dec. 5.

[Letter to the Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, Sept. 2, 2009:](#)

Green ideas

A new study reported in the journal Pediatrics links the exposure of mothers during pregnancy to polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), prevalent in areas of heavy car traffic and idling, to lower IQs in their children by age 5.

Since auto emissions are already bad for the planet and our lungs, why won't Walnut Creek enact an anti-idling ordinance as New York City has, where anyone idling a parked car more than three minutes (delivery trucks exempt) is fined \$360 first offense, no ifs, ands or buts?

The results are improved Big Apple air quality, and the fines fund schools, parks, libraries.

For that matter, why doesn't Walnut Creek ban leaf blowers, as Moraga and Los Angeles have?

A single leaf blower in one hour produces as much pollution as a midsized automobile driven from New York to Washington, D.C.

Why doesn't "green" Walnut Creek have a single recycling container in all of downtown for public use, and an ordinance against shops, stores, boutiques persisting in blocking open their doors with their air conditioning on?

Michael Scott, Walnut Creek

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Wednesday, Sept. 2, 2009:](#)

Tumbleweed control

Tumbleweeds are considered incorrectly to be an icon of the Old West. Wrong: The nasty things were imported. Their proper name is Russian thistle and they were brought in by the government -- we're here to help you -- as an erosion control and cattle food. When the tumbleweeds do their thing and tumble, they are dropping off seeds in their travels and so spread into thick, nasty mats.

They are not a problem in their native lands, as there is a mite that eats them and keeps them under control. The mite is being studied by the Department of Agriculture. These mites would not totally eliminate tumbleweeds, as when the weeds diminish so do the mites and the tumbleweeds make a comeback to start a cycle over again, but in reduced numbers. The microscopic mites are being held in quarantine to make sure that they are a specific predator to tumbleweeds and would not become a pest themselves if released.

The Bakersfield area has so many tumbleweeds that they are expensive to control in local agricultural fields; they also clog canals and damage water pumps. The cost of control is very expensive and the fact that they are burned as a control method affects our air quality.

While the economic cost would justify Bakersfield being a first area for the mite's release, the benefits to what is one of the worst air basins in the nation should be the driving factor for its initial release to this area.

Dennis Fox, Bakersfield

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the Station fire is at 22% contained. A total of 62 homes have been destroyed due to the fire. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Avanzan contra fuegos en Calif.

Contienen el Incendio Station en 22%

Univision, Wednesday, Sept. 2, 2009

LOS ÁNGELES, California - Ayudados por un incremento en la humedad y una baja en las temperaturas, los bomberos logran montar un agresivo ataque contra el Incendio Station que arde desde el miércoles al

norte de Los Ángeles, abriendo líneas de contención para proteger al observatorio Mount Wilson y las instalaciones de comunicación de varias emisoras locales.

Para la tarde del martes, el incendio que inició el miércoles pasado había incinerado 63,743 hectáreas (157,513 acres), pero la contención incrementó del 5 al 22 por ciento.

"Este es nuestro primer incremento en el nivel de contención desde que inició el fuego, y eso ha sido un poco a causa del clima pero creo que es el resultado primario de los esfuerzos de combate que se han realizado en los últimos días", explicó Mike Dietrich, comandante de incidentes del Servicio Forestal.

Un total de 62 viviendas han sido destruidas por el incendio, cuyas causas aún están bajo investigación. Miles de casas aún se consideran bajo riesgo, pero las órdenes de evacuación fueron levantadas en La Crescenta, La Cañada Flintridge y otras áreas en donde los bomberos logran combatir con éxito las llamas.

Además de proteger estructuras, los equipos trabajaron para mantener a las llamas alejadas del Monte Wilson -el sitio de un observatorio histórico y de un conjunto de torres repetidoras usadas por varias estaciones de televisión y radio del Sur de California, así como por varias agencias de seguridad pública.

"El fuego está avanzando hacia el Monte Wilson desde el norte y el oeste", dijo Dietrich durante su informe de las 5 p.m. del martes. "De momento tenemos entre 150 y 175 bomberos en la zona. Tuvimos al Martin Mars Super Scooper... arrojando agua ahí el día de hoy. Hicimos mucho trabajo de preparación y pre-tratamiento con retardantes y espuma".

El aeroplano Mars logró tirar 7,200 galones de agua en el Monte Wilson alrededor de mediodía del martes.

"Esperamos progresar alrededor del área de Monte Wilson conforme las llamas se acerquen y de momento no están avanzando, así que nos sentimos con confianza de nuestra habilidad para minimizar los daños ahí", dijo Dietrich. "El incendio no está enojado por el momento, y estamos agradecidos por eso".

Decreció la expansión del fuego

Aunque mucho del Incendio Station continuaba ardiendo fuera de control, su expansión se ha reducido dramáticamente.

Las llamas crecieron unos 6,500 hectáreas (16 mil acres) entre el lunes y el martes, pero gracias al agresivo ataque de los bomberos, el martes sólo creció en 2,400 hectáreas (6 mil acres).

Los comandantes dijeron que el ritmo de avance disminuyó en parte por el incremento en la humedad, que empezó alrededor de las 6 p.m. del lunes.

El estado de ánimo en el centro de comando en la presa Hansen era decididamente más optimista, aunque continuaba la preocupación por la fatiga entre las compañías.

Aún así los bomberos tomaron pasos agresivos para evitar que el fuego se propagara, como quemas preventivas y limpieza de maleza.

Aunque el número de viviendas destrozadas subió de 53 a 62, el subjefe del Departamento de Bomberos del Condado de Los Ángeles, Mike Bryant, dijo que los bomberos hicieron un esfuerzo valiente para salvar miles de casas en la trayectoria de las llamas.

"Cuando se piensa en las 10 mil instalaciones residenciales en estas ciudades contiguas en las laderas y en Acton y las áreas del Cañón Soledad, ha sido un gran, gran esfuerzo antifuegos por parte de todas las personas involucradas", dijo Bryant.

Al menos 3,655 bomberos fueron enviados al combatir las llamas, así como 399 camiones, ocho helicópteros, nueve helitanques, 10 aviones cisternas, 58 equipos de mano y 48 bulldozers.

Hasta ahora, los fuegos han resultado en dos fatalidades: el capitán Tedmund "Ted" Hall, de 47 años, residente de San Bernardino, y el especialista Arnaldo "Arnie" Quiñones, de 35, residente de Palmdale, quienes murieron alrededor de las 2:30 p.m. del domingo cuando el vehículo en el que viajaban se volcó cerca de Acton, cerca del Monte Gleason.

La parte sur del Bosque Nacional Ángeles permanecerá cerrada hasta el fin de semana del Día del Trabajo, y los oficiales le pidieron a la gente que evitara el área.

"Aún no estamos del otro lado", dijo Dietrich.

A la merced del clima

El valle de San Gabriel, al este de Los Ángeles, experimentó un récord de calor y baja humedad, con temperaturas que rondaron los 104º grados Fahrenheit (40º Celsius), indicó el Servicio Nacional de Meteorología al agregar que la región continúa en alerta roja.

Uno de los factores claves en la expansión del fuego es que la mayoría de las zonas es riesgo está cubiertas por una vegetación que no ha vivido un siniestro similar desde hace 40 años, lo cual las convierte en más vulnerables a las llamas.

Pero el martes el poderoso huracán Jimena, con vientos de hasta 155 millas por hora (250 kilómetros por hora), que avanzaba por el Pacífico hacia la península mexicana de Baja California -norte de México y sur de California-, aumentó las posibilidades de tormentas para el lado de la frontera estadounidense que está en llamas.

El martes no estaba clara la suerte de las cinco personas atrapadas en una de las zonas montañosas incendiándose en Los Ángeles y que fueron criticadas por las autoridades por no atender la orden de evacuación.

Uno de los miembros de ese grupo fue citado por algunos medios negando el supuesto pedido de ayuda porque afirman que no se encuentran en peligro.

California es azotada con frecuencia por incendios forestales debido a un clima seco, vientos y el crecimiento inmobiliario de los últimos años que provocó la construcción de zonas residenciales en áreas forestales.

En 2007 el sur del estado fue devastado por incendios forestales que figuraron como uno de los peores en su historia y dejaron ocho personas muertas, 2 mil casas calcinadas, 640 mil habitantes desplazados y daños por unos mil millones de dólares.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses fire dangers 12,000 homes and the worst part of the fire season has not begun.](#)

Fuego aún amenaza 12.000 casas y aún no empieza peor temporada

Por Greg Risling, The Associated Press
Univision, Tuesday, Sept. 1, 2009

Los bomberos lograron el martes algunos avances en su lucha contra un incendio gigantesco cerca de Los Angeles pero advirtieron que esto podría ser apenas un anticipo del futuro inmediato, ya que el pico de la temporada de incendios en el sur de California ni siquiera ha empezado.

Los peores incendios suelen comenzar en el otoño boreal cuando el fuerte viento de Santa Ana puede empujar las llamas desde las áreas más agrestes hasta los suburbios de la ciudad. Este año, el sur del estado podría tener una larga temporada de incendios.

"Cuando vemos que un incendio arde como éste sin el viento de Santa Ana, sabemos que con el viento sería mucho peor, mucho más intenso", dijo el capitán Mark Whaling, de los bomberos del condado de Los Angeles.

El Santa Ana puede ser altamente devastador cuando impulsa un incendio porque baja desde el norte y alcanza velocidades altas al pasar por cañones y pasos montañosos para lanzarse sobre las áreas urbanizadas.

Los vientos han estado calmos desde que el incendio comenzó al norte de Los Angeles, pero las llamas cubrieron casi 500 kilómetros cuadrados (190 millas cuadradas) de bosque en una semana. Unas 12.000 viviendas seguían en peligro mientras aviones y 3.600 bomberos combatían las llamas a lo largo de un frente de 80 kilómetros (50 millas).

Las llamas ya destruyeron 53 casas y causaron graves daños en el vecindario suburbano de Tujunga Canyon, donde los residentes regresaban a ver qué quedaba de sus hogares.

Unas 2.000 personas se vieron obligadas a evacuar sus viviendas en medio del calor sofocante de las llamas mientras los jefes de los bomberos advertían que tomaría semanas contener el fuego.

El incendio estaba rodeado apenas en un 5%, pero el comandante del Servicio Forestal Mike Dietrich dijo que esa cifra podría duplicarse hacia la noche del martes y estaba satisfecho con el avance.

"Hay mucho más trabajo para hacer", dijo. "Aún es una situación muy riesgosa, aún podría darse vuelta".

El incendio de Station no era el único importante en el sur del estado.

Al este de Los Angeles, 2.000 casas corrían peligro por un fuego de casi 4 kilómetros cuadrados (1,5 millas cuadradas) en Oak Glen y cerca de allí, en Yucaipa, otro incendio de similar tamaño amenazaba unas 900 viviendas.

"Hay acción en todos lados", dijo el gobernador Arnold Schwarzenegger en una conferencia de prensa interrumpida por el ruido de un helicóptero, en el condado de San Bernardino.

El clima estaba más húmedo el martes, lo que ayuda a que los arbustos no se quemen tan rápido pero también significa que hay más posibilidades de rayos. Hubo algunas lloviznas, pero no lluvias considerables.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses fires in California are not under control; funeral service is announced for fallen firefighter.](#)

Incendio de California sin control; Anuncian servicio fúnebre de bombero

Impacto USA, Tuesday, Sept. , 2009

Washington, 1 sep (EFE).- Los incendios que desde hace seis días han consumido más de 42.000 hectáreas y han arrasado medio centenar de viviendas, continúan hoy avanzando sin control hacia Los Ángeles, informaron las autoridades.

El incendio "Station", el mayor de los varios que afectan California en el fin del verano, avanzaba este martes por la densa vegetación de las colinas en las montañas San Gabriel, dejando atrás una franja quemada desde Altadena hasta el desierto.

Ayer el fuego avanzó hacia el oeste, causó nuevas evacuaciones en el área de Sunland-Tujunga y se aproximó a pocos kilómetros de Santa Clarita.

El diario The Los Angeles Times indicó hoy que, a pesar de la extensión del fuego que cubre unos 40 kilómetros de este a oeste y 30 kilómetros de norte a sur, "los agresivos esfuerzos de los bomberos en tierra y por aire han logrado contener las llamas a áreas en su mayoría despobladas".

Las autoridades concentraron desde el lunes sus esfuerzos en derribar ramas y abrir trincheras para salvar al observatorio Monte Wilson y un conjunto de torres de comunicación que emplean casi 50 estaciones de radio y televisión y agencias del Gobierno de EE.UU.

Las condiciones podrían tornarse más peligrosas si el fuego alcanza las comunidades en los valles Antelope, Santa Clarita y San Gabriel.

Los responsables gubernamentales ordenaron la evacuación de más de 6.000 casas y no se espera que el fuego sea contenido hasta la semana

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses aerosols is the possible cause for low rain levels in the Mexico City. The city faces serious rationings of water in 2010 due to climate change.](#)

Aerosoles, posible causa de bajas lluvias en la Ciudad de México

Diego Moctezuma

El Periódico de México, Wed., Sept. 2, 2009

El Distrito Federal y zonas de los estados de México, Morelos y Puebla, por lo menos, se encuentran bajo la amenaza de severo desabasto de agua para 2010, lo cual tiene que ver con el cambio climático.

Una de las causas de este fenómeno que ocupa a la ciencia mundial está asociada con la concentración de aerosoles en la atmósfera, que según Beata Kucienska, estudiante posdoctoral del Centro de Ciencias de la Atmósfera (CCA) de la UNAM, inhibe la lluvia en la Ciudad de México.

La académica del Departamento de Física de Nubes del CCA asegura que esta situación la descubrió en los resultados de un modelo virtual de "parcela de aire", que estudió la influencia de diversas sustancias en la formación de gotas. Kucienska tiene claro que los efectos de contaminantes orgánicos e inorgánicos en el desarrollo de las nubes calientes sobre la Ciudad de México.

Qué hay detrás: un aerosol es una mezcla heterogénea de partículas sólidas o líquidas suspendidas en un gas. Su tamaño varía de 0.002 nanómetros a más de 100 nanómetros, esto es, desde unas pocas moléculas hasta el tamaño en el que las partículas no pueden durar varias horas suspendidas en el gas. La generación de aerosoles puede ser de origen natural por la actividad humana.

Los científicos dicen que en el primer caso, las mezclas que llegan a la atmósfera proceden de volcanes, tormentas de polvo, pulverización de agua marina, incendios forestales y de pastizales. En el segundo, los aerosoles se generan por la quema de combustibles fósiles y la alteración de la superficie terrestre.

Para su estudio, Kucienska seleccionó los componentes integrados en un centímetro cúbico de aire y observó cómo se desarrolló la nube hasta que se logró una humedad relativa de 100%.

"Comprobamos que en un escenario no contaminado se generan gotas grandes que favorecen la lluvia, mientras que cuando existen altas concentraciones de aerosoles, como en la Ciudad de México, se inhibe el desarrollo de las gotitas que forman nubes y, en consecuencia, se retrasa el desarrollo de gotas más grandes, que son las que generan lluvia", según la investigadora.

Mencionó que la siembra de lluvia es un reto científico que implica conocer a fondo la física de las nubes, pues solamente con el conocimiento de su formación y en qué condiciones crean lluvia, es posible pensar en manipular una precipitación pluvial. Crear nubes artificiales que generen lluvia lo hizo en 1946 el químico estadounidense Vincent Schaefer, quien utilizó cristales de hielo seco, dióxido de carbono, dentro de una cámara enfriadora para bajar la temperatura de una habitación.

Se sorprendió cuando comenzó a crearse una nube alrededor del hielo, pues el vapor dentro de la cámara se condensó sobre los cristales de hielo y formó una niebla.

Kucienska explicó que en el cielo sucede algo parecido. El vapor necesita pequeñas partículas llamadas núcleos para iniciar la condensación; polvo, arena o cristales de sal pueden servir como núcleos. Las gotas de agua crecen sobre esas partículas y cuando tienen un tamaño suficiente caen como lluvia. El reto de sembrar lluvia es enorme, pero podría ayudar a enfrentar muchos problemas en este siglo, para evitar sequías y modular las precipitaciones para evitar inundaciones.

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