

Sooty air over San Joaquin Valley triggers health warning

By Mark Grossi and Barbara Anderson

In The Fresno Bee, Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Wednesday, Dec. 18, 2013

Soot pollution spiked more than two times the federal health threshold Tuesday, prompting a warning for San Joaquin Valley residents to stay indoors as much as possible.

The Valley on Tuesday had the nation's worst particle pollution, known as PM-2.5, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's website.

Air authorities advise school administrators to check the hourly readings posted on the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's website before allowing children out to play.

"It is very unhealthy for people to be outside exerting themselves in these conditions," said district spokeswoman Jaime Holt. "We are asking people to stop burning wood in fireplaces and wood stoves."

Doctors in Fresno are seeing patients with complaints of coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath because of the bad air. Dr. John Gasman, a pulmonologist at Kaiser Permanent Medical Center-Fresno, said people with asthma, chronic pulmonary obstructive disease (COPD) and other lung diseases are showing up in increasing numbers as the pollution siege continues.

The tiny specks have been building in the stagnant, dry air for days, the district said. A small storm is supposed to reach the Fresno area by Thursday, but meteorologists were not certain it would be enough to clean out the pollution.

Over the last several days, air district leaders have been prohibiting wood burning in fireplaces for many parts of the Valley. Holt said this is among the more intense PM-2.5 episodes in the last few years.

People who violate the no-burn orders could be cited and fined. More than 125 notices of violation have been written Valleywide this year through Tuesday, compared to 78 at this point last year. The fine for violating the no-burn order is \$50.

Air district officials are responding to phone calls from residents who report neighbors burning in violation of the burning ban.

The federal fine-particle standard has been breached each day for the last week in at least one of the eight Valley counties. This week, the exceedances are happening in most cities.

On Tuesday, the district's air monitors showed spikes more than twice the federal standard for PM-2.5 in Clovis, Fresno, Merced and Visalia.

Hanford was more than three times the standard at midday -- 120 parts per cubic meter of air. The federal threshold for PM-2.5 is a daily average of 35 parts per cubic meter of air.

Particle pollution comes from diesel exhaust, dust and other sources, too. It also forms in the atmosphere by combining oxides of nitrogen from cars and ammonia plumes from such sources as dairies.

The tiny particles can penetrate deep into the lungs, triggering asthma and heart problems. The particles are considered more dangerous than summertime ozone.

Even people with healthy lungs can have a burning throat, shortness of breath, coughing and burning eyes, said Gasman of Kaiser.

"If this were to continue for a week, the asthma and COPD patients will be in the ER and the healthy patients will be in the doctors' offices," he said.

Air district warns of gusty winds, blowing dust

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Dec. 18, 2013

The valley air district issued a health cautionary statement for southern Kern County through Tuesday evening because of blowing dust caused by gusty winds.

Winds will be particularly gusty and strong through the Grapevine, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. They may also add to problems already being caused by existing high levels of particulate matter in the air basin.

The district said unhealthy concentrations of particulate matter can aggravate lung disease, trigger asthma attacks and bronchitis, and increase risk of respiratory infections.

It warned that older adults and children should avoid prolonged exposure or heavy exertion in some areas.

People can check the nearest air monitor to them to see local conditions. They can visit the Real-time Air Advisory Network page on the district's website to subscribe for free:
http://www.valleyair.org/Programs/RAAN/raan_landing.htm.

Air quality forces WYL soccer openers to be postponed

By Richard de Give

Hanford Sentinel, Wednesday, Dec. 18, 2013

HANFORD – Poor air quality delayed the start of the West Yosemite League boys and girls soccer seasons on Tuesday for local high schools.

Three WYL games were scheduled in the county, including boys and girls games between Hanford West and Lemoore and a boys game between Redwood and Hanford.

All games were rescheduled for Jan. 8.

Games scheduled in Visalia, including a Hanford-Redwood girls game, were canceled as well, said Hanford High athletic director Beau Hill.

“Once the Air Quality Index hits 141 or above, there’s no outdoor activities allowed,” Hill said.

Outdoors practices were canceled as well, Hill said.

Tuesday’s AQI was forecast at 161 for Kings County, with a forecast of 172 for today, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District’s Web site.

Kings County is currently at Level 5, or high pollution, status, for air quality, said Jaime Holt, chief communications specialist for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Warnings in the winter have become more common, she explained, due to increased particulate matters in the air.

Some weather that would stir the air, such as a storm, would bring the AQI down, she said. Forecasts, however, call for showers in places Thursday and mostly sunny skies on Friday and Saturday.

Wood burning has been banned in the area for several days.

On Thursday, Hanford is scheduled to play Golden West and Hanford West is to take on Redwood. The boys’ games are scheduled in Visalia and the girls games in Hanford.

Lemoore is scheduled to play Reedley today, the boys in Reedley and the girls in Lemoore.