

Fireworks: Hazardous to air quality and health

Modesto Bee, Merced Sun-Star and other papers, Thursday, July 3, 2014

Local air officials are reminding residents that Independence Day fireworks increase levels of dangerous particulate matter, posing a threat to air quality and health.

Fireworks emit large quantities of particulate matter, including soot, ash and metals. These can trigger serious health problems, especially in people with existing respiratory conditions, elderly people and small children, officials said.

Fine-particulate matter can invade the bloodstream and has been linked to heart attacks and strokes. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, even short-term exposure to smoke can aggravate respiratory problems such as asthma attacks and acute bronchitis.

"Steps that people should take to avoid exposure to high levels of particulates produced by fireworks include staying away from fireworks as they are burned, such as staying inside," San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District spokeswoman Janelle Schneider said via email.

Asked if common dust masks available in hardware stores offer protection, she said, "the air district is not expert on their use or effectiveness." But she referenced an EPA document that says, "Paper 'comfort' or 'dust' masks ... are designed to trap large particles, such as sawdust. These masks generally will not protect your lungs from the fine particles in smoke."

High levels of particulate matter can also jeopardize the Valley's progress in meeting air-quality standards set to protect public health.

"We're appealing to Valley residents to think about the impact of fireworks on their personal health and their neighbors' health," Jaime Holt, the air district's chief communications officer, said in a news release. "Each year, people suffer from serious health consequences of activities that are entirely preventable."

Officials urge residents to refrain from lighting fireworks because air quality in the Valley during summer is already burdened by ozone pollution. Fireworks emissions add to what already may be poor air quality.

Air monitors throughout the Valley show a typical increase in particulate matter pollution every year following fireworks displays.

"The return to low particulate levels can vary depending on other factors that surround fireworks use, such as stagnant atmosphere or other events (wildfires, etc.)," Schneider said. "In Fresno last year, PM2.5 (fine particles) levels rocketed up to extremely unhealthy around 11 p.m. but fell back to low levels within a couple of hours. However, there are no guarantees as to the behavior of PM from fireworks as extenuating circumstances vary from city to city.

"The most important message we wish to emphasize is that it is far easier to maintain acceptable air quality by not lighting fireworks in the first place."

Residents can check local air quality data through the Air District's Real-time Air Advisory Network found at www.valleyair.org/RAAN.

Independence Day can be hazardous to those with respiratory problems

Stockton Record, Thursday, July 3, 2014

Independence Day brings out a lot of national pride and desire to celebrate, but for those with respiratory problems, it can be a hazardous day.

Fireworks increase the levels of dangerous particulate matter and can pose a health threat. Even "safe and sane" fireworks emit this matter, including soot, ash and metals.

Air quality in the Valley during the summer -- even before fireworks -- is often unhealthy with large amounts of ozone pollution. Fireworks emissions add to what might already be poor air quality.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District urges restraint in using fireworks.

Air officials urge July 4 fireworks restraint

By staff writer

The Porterville Recorder, Thursday, July 3, 2014

Local air officials are reminding Valley residents that Independence Day fireworks increase levels of dangerous particulate matter and pose a health threat to themselves and their neighbors.

Fireworks emit large quantities of PM, including soot, ash and metals, which cause serious health impacts, especially to people with existing respiratory conditions, elderly people and small children.

Fine-particulate matter – PM2.5 – can invade the bloodstream and has been linked to heart attacks and stroke. In addition, high levels of PM jeopardize the Valley's progress in meeting air-quality standards that protect public health.

"We're appealing to Valley residents to think about the impact of fireworks on their personal health and their neighbors' health," said Jaime Holt, the District's chief communications officer. "Each year, people suffer from serious health consequences of activities that are entirely preventable."

Air quality in the Valley during the summer is already burdened by ozone pollution, and fireworks emissions add to what already may be poor air quality. Air monitors throughout the Valley reflect spikes in particulate pollution every year following Fourth of July fireworks displays.

The Air District's Real-time Air Advisory Network (RAAN) makes localized air quality data available from an extensive air-monitoring network.

Visit www.valleyair.org/RAAN to subscribe to the free service. Air quality data is also available through a free iPhone app, Valley Air, available at the App Store or iTunes.

For more information about the Air District, call a regional office in Fresno, 230-6000; Modesto, 557-64000; or Bakersfield, 392-5500.

Chowchilla nut cooperative adds new huller and sheller

By Ana B. Ibarra

Merced Sun-Star and Sacramento Bee, Sunday, Jun. 29, 2014

CHOWCHILLA -- Minturn Hullers Cooperative of Chowchilla held an open house Friday to showcase its new, state-of-the-art almond huller and sheller.

This is the third addition to the the Madera County almond processing facility that last year produced more than 80 million meat pounds of almonds. With the new huller and sheller, Minturn expects to nearly double its capacity, processing more than 150 million pounds during this harvest.

Joe Marchini, director at Minturn's plant, said the \$24 million project took about two years to complete. The investment came as a result in an increase in demand and production volume, Marchini explained.

The 61,000-square-foot structure houses the processing equipment, bulk shipping and warehouse.

Mike Beeler, owner and president of Beeler Industries, which designed and built the new huller, said it is probably one of the largest in the Valley.

Beeler explained that the most important aspect of the new facility is its focus on food safety and product quality.

Beeler Industries and the cooperative also worked with Lewis M. Carter Manufacturing of Georgia and Donaldson Torit of Minneapolis to implement new separation technology and air-filtration equipment. Beeler explained that the filtered air intakes allow the processor to operate with closed doors, diminishing any possibility of outside contamination.

Because the process of removing the debris and almond hulls are potential sources of air emissions, the new equipment aims to minimize dust, increase sanitation and allow the processed nuts to be loaded onto trucks in an environmentally controlled space.

Plant supervisor Jeff George said the new facility can process about 800,000 pounds of almonds per day.

"This will definitely help us get through production a lot quicker," George said, "We're talking about a 110 percent production increase."

George said the new plant also helped create jobs, as two 10-person shifts have been added to operate the new equipment.

The new processing project is scheduled to start working in mid-July for the upcoming harvest.

Despite the hard hit that California's \$4 billion almond industry has taken with the drought, Marchini believes the market will continue to grow, and this investment is representative of it, he said.

"This project pretty much states what our view of the California almond industry is and what we think of that future. It is very bright," said Jeff Hamilton, Minturn's general manager in a news release.

"Our existing grower members are continuing to expand their operations. ... This facility will allow us to take care of growers that have been committed to this cooperative for so many years," Hamilton said.

Minturn Hullers opened in 1966 and has grown from 120 members to 300. In the past four seasons, processing has lasted until mid-January.