

Expect smoke-fouled air all week

Hanford Sentinel, Tuesday, Sept. 8, 2015

If you were commuting to work Tuesday morning, it was tough to miss: A huge plume of haze in the eastern sky, a sickly looking sun and the smell of smoke.

Expect more of the same all week thanks to the Rough Fire, according to San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials.

They issued a health cautionary statement Tuesday indicating that a high pressure system is holding smoke in place in the Valley as it drifts down from the Kings River canyon northeast of Hanford.

The health caution remains in effect until the fire is extinguished. Currently, the fire is 31 percent contained and is growing.

Schools are being urged to keep students inside.

Fine particle pollution caused by smoke from the Rough Fire affects the young, older adults and people with respiratory illnesses.

California wildfire to spew smoke through holiday weekend

By Scott Smith, Associated Press

Fresno Bee, Modesto Bee and other papers, Saturday, Sept. 5, 2015

FRESNO, Calif. - A vast and stubborn wildfire that has proven California's biggest this year was expected to spew smoke through the long Labor Day weekend, leaving some campgrounds empty and prompting health warnings.

The fire burning east of Fresno grew overnight to 134 square miles. It was 25 percent contained Saturday.

The blaze is just one factor that has challenged people planning outdoor activities in recent weeks, officials said.

An infestation of bugs swarmed high-desert communities on the eastern slopes of the Sierra Nevada. In addition, an 18-day manhunt along the famed Pacific Crest Trail ended with the suspect's death.

The fire that began July 31 during a lightning strike has closed roads and about 10 campgrounds around Hume Lake and Kings Canyon.

U.S. Forest Service spokeswoman Denise Alonzo urged holiday campers to head to the mountains far south of the fire, where they can expect cleaner air and better views of nature, including some of the range's 100 groves of Giant Sequoia trees, some of the Earth's largest and oldest living things.

"We're concerned about people trying to stay in their tents and outdoors with so much smoke in the air," Alonzo said. "It's not healthy."

Smoke from the fire prompted the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to issue a health warning to people headed to the mountains and foothills of Tulare and Fresno counties.

The district says children and the elderly are especially vulnerable. Residents on the valley floor from Merced and south to Kern County may also notice smoke into next week.

Half a dozen wildfires were burning throughout California, a relatively small number compared to the past two hot months that kept firefighters running, said Daniel Berlant, a spokesman for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

Despite the welcomed lull caused by cooler temperatures, he said fire season is entering its peak time.

Vegetation remains dry from the hot summer, and the winds pick up in the transition to fall, fanning the smallest spark.

"Conditions are still just as dry as July and August," he said. "One less spark this Labor Day weekend means one less wildfire."

Wildfire may pose health concern over Labor Day Weekend

Vida en el Valle, Thursday, Sept. 3, 2015

The Rough Fire has prompted local air officials to issue a health cautionary statement for smoke impacts throughout the Tulare and Fresno County foothill and mountain communities during the Labor Day weekend.

Those individuals planning to camp or recreate in these areas should be advised that they may be seriously impacted by smoke.

Smoke impacts on the Valley floor will also become possible Saturday evening and into next week potentially affecting Merced, Madera, Fresno, Tulare, Kings and the Valley air basin portion of Kern Counties. Potential impacts from wildfire smoke will continue to be a concern until the fire is extinguished.

Smoke from fires produces fine-particulate matter (PM2.5), which can cause serious health problems including lung disease, asthma attacks and increased risk of heart attacks and stroke.

Where conditions warrant, people with heart or lung disease should follow their doctors' advice for dealing with episodes of particulate exposure. Additionally, older adults and children should avoid prolonged exposure or heavy exertion, depending on their local conditions. If possible, individuals should remove themselves from those areas where there are direct smoke impacts.

People with existing respiratory conditions, young children and elderly people are especially susceptible to health effects from these pollutants. Air District officials urge residents to follow their doctors' orders when exposed to fire emissions.

Residents can check the District's wildfire page at www.valleyair.org/wildfires for information about any current wildfires and whether they are impacting the Valley.

For more information, visit www.valleyair.org or call a District office in Fresno (559-230-6000), Modesto (209-557-6400) or Bakersfield (661-381-1809).

Vast, stubborn Fresno wildfire expected to rage through long weekend

By Associated Press

Los Angeles Times, Friday, September 5, 2015

A vast and stubborn wildfire that has proven California's biggest this year was expected to spew smoke through the long Labor Day weekend, leaving some campgrounds empty and prompting health warnings.

The fire that has burned 130 square miles east of Fresno is just one factor that has challenged people planning outdoor activities in recent weeks, officials said Friday.

An infestation of bugs swarmed high-desert communities on the eastern slopes of the Sierra Nevada. In addition, an 18-day manhunt along the famed Pacific Crest Trail ended with the suspect's death.

Katherine Yi of West Los Angeles leads groups of fledgling backpackers each summer in wilderness training classes through the High Sierra, but the large wildfire has forced her to cancel two recent outings.

"It seems like this is becoming the norm," Yi said. "If I try to plan a trip, they have a fire there."

The fire that began on July 31 during a lightning strike has closed roads and about 10 campgrounds around Hume Lake and Kings Canyon. It was 25 percent contained.

U.S. Forest Service spokeswoman Denise Alonzo urged holiday campers to head to the mountains far south of the fire, where they can expect cleaner air and better views of nature, including some of the range's 100 groves of Giant Sequoia trees, some of the Earth's largest and oldest living things.

"We're concerned about people trying to stay in their tents and outdoors with so much smoke in the air," Alonzo said. "It's not healthy."

Smoke from the fire prompted the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to issue a health warning to people headed to the mountains and foothills of Tulare and Fresno counties.

The district says children and the elderly are especially vulnerable. Residents on the valley floor from Merced and south to Kern County may also notice smoke into next week.

Half a dozen wildfires were burning throughout California, a relatively small number compared to the past two hot months that kept firefighters running, said Daniel Berlant, a spokesman for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

Despite the welcomed lull caused by cooler temperatures, he said fire season is entering its peak time.

Evacuations ordered near Rough fire

By Andrea Castillo

The Fresno Bee, Monday, September 7, 2015

The Rough fire grew overnight by nearly 10,000 acres, injuring a firefighter and causing the Fresno County Sheriff's Office on Monday to order mandatory evacuations in areas near Dunlap and Crabtree.

Forest service officials said a firefighter was burned Monday morning while working as part of a night shift crew in the Converse Basin, looking for spot fires along Hoist Ridge. He was transported to a local hospital for treatment, where he remains in stable condition.

The fire stood at 86,000 acres on Sunday. By Monday morning, the U.S. Forest Service reported it was at 95,183 acres. It is 31 percent contained.

Because of the changing nature of the fire, officials are evacuating people north of the intersection of Highway 180 and Millwood Road in Dunlap, specifically an area bounded by U.S. Forest Service Road 12S01 and Sampson Flat Road to the south and Crabtree to the north; and U.S. Forest Service Road and 12S19 to the west and Cherry Gap (U.S. Forest Service Road 13S03 and Highway 180) to the east.

There is no timetable for when the evacuations might be lifted.

Most of the burn is in the Sierra National Forest, where the fire started July 31 with a lightning strike 5 miles north of Hume Lake in the Kings River Drainage. However, about 37,000 acres are on fire in the Sequoia National Forest, and more than 2,000 acres are burning in Sequoia/Kings Canyon National Park.

On Sunday, firefighters conducted a burnout along Hoist Ridge in the Converse Basin, carrying the fire down to within a few hundred feet of the Kings River. Consistent wind and prior preparation made the operation a success. Forest service officials say the containment lines going east along Highway 180 look good.

The fire stretches north of Cedar Grove, said Rough fire spokesman Andy Isolano. But it is heading northeast, away from the Kings River. Fire crews are trying to steer it up into the granite canyon.

Isolano said the fire has dipped into the canyon, which runs roughly from Boyden Cavern to Cedar Grove, a few times in the past week. At one point, it burned down one side of the canyon and back up the other, he said.

"But it's all low brush, lots of granite, so nothing of real consequence," he said.

The combination of burn operations and increased fire activity on the east side resulted in the increase in acreage, as well as a few spot fires that broke out. Firefighters attacked the spots Sunday and continued to monitor them through the night.

As conditions allowed on Monday, helicopters and firefighters continued to strengthen the line along Hoist Ridge and extend it down to the Kings River. Crews will strengthen the line around the perimeter of the fire and protect structures in Cedar Grove, although the fire is 1.5 miles away.

On the north end, stable weather is allowing forces to control the fire. But hotter, drier weather and increased winds predicted for the days ahead might challenge those operations.

On the northwest side, control lines are being cleaned up and monitored. Gear and fire hoses are being pulled off the line if not needed.

Isolano said the forest service has received many questions about smoke. When the winds die down, it allows smoke to leave the canyon and drift into the Valley as the day heats up.

Hazy conditions observed in north Fresno can likely be attributed to the Rough fire, Isolano said. "It's not that there's more fire," he said. "It's just that the conditions are letting the smoke out."