

County officials warn residents to take precautions due to smoky air

By Joe Goldeen

Stockton Record, Friday, July 27, 2018

STOCKTON — Have you been coughing the past few days? Got a scratchy throat? Stinging eyes? Runny nose?

You're not alone. Smoke from wildfires to the west — the Marsh Fire in eastern Contra Costa County — and the east — the massive and still largely uncontained Ferguson Fire west of Yosemite — combined with changing wind patterns have conspired to cause high levels of air pollution descending on San Joaquin County.

Because of the unpredictable conditions, air quality could be impacted for several more days, improving at times or getting worse, very quickly, according to San Joaquin County Public Health Services.

If you see or smell smoke, you are likely being impacted by it, the agency noted in a cautionary statement issued Thursday afternoon.

Health officials along with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District are monitoring the fires and air quality conditions and will alert residents if the situation worsens.

Particles carried by the smoke — a mixture of gases and invisible particulates from burning trees and plants — can cause breathing problems and other symptoms, even in healthy people. People with chronic heart and lung diseases are at greater risk for problems, including chest pain, rapid heartbeat, shortness of breath and fatigue, according to the health agency.

Children also are at higher risk from smoke because their airways are still developing and because they breathe more air per pound of body weight than adults. Also, they are more likely to be active outdoors where the greatest exposure is.

County Public Health Officer Dr. Kismet Brown provided a number of precautions residents should follow to protect their health and that of their loved ones, especially older and younger family members:

- If you see or smell smoke in your immediate area, stay indoors, if possible, with windows and doors closed and turn on the air conditioning to recirculate to avoid drawing outside air inside. Also in your vehicle, use the “recirculating” air function.
- If your home is too hot, consider leaving and visiting an indoor mall, library or someone else's home equipped with air conditioning.
- Those with heart or lung disease, older adults, pregnant women and children should avoid prolonged or heavy exertion outside. Outdoor activities should be moved or rescheduled for when the air quality improves. If that's not possible, at least take several breaks during the outdoor activity.
- Ensure family members with heart disease or lung problems such as asthma, bronchitis or emphysema are following their doctor's advice about medicine and their respiratory management plan. Seek help if their symptoms worsen.

Due to the current smoky air in parts of the county, residents are being asked to avoid adding more pollution by curtailing such activities as wood burning, lawn mowing, leaf blowing, driving and barbecuing.

Public Health also has recommended to school administrators that they check air quality readings before allowing children outdoors when it is unhealthy.

For people who have not been previously diagnosed with a chronic lung or heart disease, health officials note that smoke can “unmask” or produce symptoms of those conditions such as chest pain or tightness, shortness of breath or fatigue. If they appear, contact a doctor.

It also is advised to keep airways moist by drinking lots of water. You also can breathe through a warm, wet washcloth to help relieve dryness.

Information on wildfire smoke and dealing with hot weather is available online from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at cdc.gov.

Other resources include:

- San Joaquin County Public Health Services at sjcphs.org.
- San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District at valleyair.org.
- Healthy Air Living at healthyairliving.com.

Ferguson Fire Over 43,000 Acres, Containment Inches Up To 27 Percent

By Gina Clugston

Sierra News Online, Thursday, July 26, 2018

MARIPOSA COUNTY – Firefighters are now in their thirteenth day of battle with the Ferguson Fire which grew by 1,723 acres overnight. The fire is now estimated at 43,299 acres, with 27 percent containment.

Firefighters and bulldozers worked through the night improving and expanding containment lines, particularly near Magoon Creek in the Kirby Peak area north of Lushmeadows, to isolate the spread of a fire that slopped over existing containment lines yesterday morning along the fire's southern perimeter.

Crews continue their prep work on the western boundary of Yosemite National Park, including in the communities of Yosemite West and Wawona.

Fire officials estimate there are 5,236 structures threatened by the fire, and except for one historic, non-residential building along Highway 140, no structures have been lost in this firefight.

There are currently 3,686 personnel assigned to the incident including 241 engines, 94 crews, 47 water tenders, 63 dozers, 18 helicopters, and fixed-wing tankers as conditions allow.

Firefighters will once again be dealing with temperatures up near 100 degrees in the canyons, and humidity is forecast to be lower as we move into the weekend.

There have been seven firefighter injuries reported, several instances of heat exhaustion-type symptoms, and a few allergic reactions to bee stings.

There has been one fatality on the fire.

We will update with details of today's activity on the fireline's after tonight's briefing.

Make sure you are signed up to receive alerts if wildfire or other emergencies threaten.

To sign up for the Mariposa Sheriff's Office Emergency Alert System visit <https://local.nixle.com/register>.

To register for the Madera County Sheriff's Office Emergency Alert System visit mcalert.org.

Two Ferguson Fire community meetings are scheduled – one for today, July 26, at the Mariposa County Fairgrounds Sequoia Hall, from 6 to 7 p.m.; a second on Friday, July 27, in Groveland and Tenaya Elementary School. Representatives from the Unified Command of Cal Fire, the U.S. Forest Service and the Mariposa County Sheriff's Office will present an overview of the current situation and actions underway to contain the fire. Please arrive early as the meetings will start promptly at 6 p.m. If you have questions about the meetings, please call the Ferguson Fire Info Line at (530) 377-6221.

The Glacier Point Road inside Yosemite National Park has been closed to accommodate firefighting resources and activities at a small base camp located at the Yosemite Ski and Snowboard Area (formerly Badger Pass) and Bridalveil Creek Campground (which is also closed).

The west entrance (El Portal) to Yosemite National Park on Highway 140 is closed.

Yosemite Valley and Wawona are closed to the public as of noon Wednesday, July 25. The closure is expected to last through Sunday, July 29. Highway 120 east and west remains open, along with Tuolumne Meadows. For information on Yosemite National Park, go to nps.gov/yose or call 209-372-0200.

As of July 21, there are fire restrictions in place on the Sierra National Forest. Please read and be informed before you use any type of fire in the forest.

The Incident Command Post for the Ferguson Fire is located at the Ahwahnee Hills Regional Park. Please be aware of heavy fire equipment moving through the area.

The fire is under Unified Command with Cal Fire, U.S. Forest Service, Yosemite National Park and the Mariposa County Sheriff's Office. Management of the fire transitioned to a Type 1 Management Team – California Team 4 on Thursday, July 19.

The Ferguson Fire started on Friday, July 13, at 8:30 p.m. The cause remains under investigation.

Smoke from the Ferguson Fire is impacting the Mariposa County Air Pollution Control District and across the region. For information specific to Mariposa County visit <http://www.mariposacounty.org/index.aspx?NID=1434>. For additional information on air quality you can visit the AirNow website or the air fire smoke page.

Residents can check the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's wildfire page at www.valleyair.org/wildfires for information about any current wildfires and whether they are impacting the Valley. The District's Real-time Air Advisory Network (RAAN) provides localized air quality data from an extensive air-monitoring network which allows Valley residents to track PM at any Valley address by visiting myraan.com.