

Merced College cancels Monday classes due to lingering Camp Fire smoke, officials say

By Vikaas Shanker

MercedSun-Star, Monday, Nov. 19, 2018

Merced College Superintendent Chris Vitelli closed Merced College's facilities and operations, including classes, Monday out of concern of wildfire smoke lingering in the San Joaquin Valley, according to school officials.

The closure includes all Merced and Los Banos campus facilities, along with the Business Resource Center and all off-campus classes, according to a news release posted Sunday night.

"Please know this decision is solely based on health and safety concerns," Vitelli said in a post on the college's Facebook page.

A decision on whether the closure will continue to Tuesday will be made at 4 p.m. Monday as officials continue to monitor air quality levels, Vitelli said.

The college joined UC Merced in its decision to cancel classes Monday. UC Merced has already canceled classes for the rest of the week, according to a statement.

Schools of all levels in Merced County have modified schedules due to the smoke from the Camp Fire in Butte County, according to a news release. Playoff football games also have been postponed.

Merced County air quality was "unhealthy" Monday, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The Camp Fire has been identified as one of the worst wildfires in the state's history. As of Monday morning, it has burned 151,000 acres in 11 days and is 66 percent contained, according to Butte County Calfire. A total of 77 people have been killed and three firefighters have been injured.

Got the bad air blues? Rain is coming, says weather service

By Ashleigh Panoo And Cresencio Rodriguez-Delgado

Fresno Bee, Sunday, Nov. 18, 2018

The Valley's air quality remained poor Saturday, as smoke from California's wildfires traveled across the state.

However, help from Mother Nature could arrive just in time for Thanksgiving. The National Weather Service is forecasting up to an 80 percent chance of rain Wednesday in the Valley and for much of California.

In the meantime, a high-pressure system sitting above the Valley will remain throughout the weekend, trapping smoke here, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Carlos Molina, meteorologist at the National Weather Service station in Hanford, said rain is expected to start hitting the northern Valley floor at about sunrise Wednesday. Light rain is expected throughout the day in Fresno starting at about 10 a.m., he said.

Stronger showers are predicted to arrive at nighttime Wednesday. Molina said that compared to the daytime forecast of tenth of an inch of rain, about three times that amount will fall on Wednesday night.

The upcoming showers are expected to be preceded by winds that will help push out smoke toward Nevada and clean up the air in time for rain to fall.

Rain will pour into Thanksgiving Day and will produce spotty shower activity throughout the day, Molina said. A second storm that is expected to remain mostly in Northern California will arrive Friday. With that storm, Fresno will see much less rain than expected in the first storm of the week.

Areas above 7,000 feet in the Sierra Nevada Mountains will get a dusting of snow as the first rains on Wednesday move east on Thursday. Next Friday's storm is expected to last into Saturday.

Fresno's air quality reached level five, the most hazardous level, overnight Friday, according to the air district. It has been hovering just below that, at a level four, throughout the day.

“While this is not going to be a heavy rain event, the fact that we’ve seen almost no rain for the month of October and the middle part of November, this is a welcome relief,” Molina said.

Meantime, the air district recommends staying indoors and keeping an eye on the young and the elderly. Another tip: consider changing home and car air filters.

Air quality alerts will remain in effect throughout the weekend and until the fires are extinguished, the weather service said. The Camp Fire near Chico is still burning, as is the Alder/Mountaineer Fire, five miles west of Camp Nelson.

To check current conditions in your area, visit the air pollution control district’s website at www.valleyair.org.

Poor air quality prompts health warning, university closure

By Kristina Hacker

Turlock Journal, Friday, November 16, 2018

Smoke from the Camp Fire in Butte County prompted the Stanislaus County Public Health Agency to issue a health hazard warning starting on Wednesday. The exceeding poor air quality was also the cause of closures of the Turlock and Stockton campuses of California State University, Stanislaus and the cancellation of all outdoor activities at Turlock Unified School District sites.

Smoke from wildfires produces particulate matter which can trigger asthma attacks, aggravate chronic heart and lung diseases and increase the risk of heart attack and stroke. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District monitors the Fine Particulate Matter in the air. When the Fine Particulate Matter is greater than 55 µg/m³ it is considered “Unhealthy.” On Wednesday, the Fine Particulate Matter reached 146 µg/m³, Level 5 — Very Unhealthy.

The health caution will remain in place and smoke impacts are likely, until the fires are extinguished.

The Stanislaus County Public Health Agency recommended that residents take the following precautions:

- Minimize outdoor activities
- Stay indoors with windows and doors closed as much as possible
- Do not run fans that bring smoky outdoor air inside
- Run your air-conditioner or heat only if it does not bring smoke in from the outdoors
- Consider leaving the area until smoke conditions improve if you experience symptoms related to smoke exposure
- Know current air quality by checking at <https://www.valleyair.org/myraan/>

The health agency recommends contacting a health care provider if you experience the following symptoms that do not improve after moving indoors or into a safe air quality environment:

- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Wheezing
- Chest tightness or pain
- Palpitations
- Nausea or unusual fatigue
- Lightheadedness and/or feeling faint

As always, if you or someone you know is experiencing an emergency, call 9-1-1.

Students of both Stanislaus State and Turlock Unified School District should monitor their respective school websites and social media pages for updates on activity closures.