

Rain on the way later this week, may impact Thanksgiving travel

By Jason Kotowski

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Rainfall could make Thanksgiving travel even worse than usual as an 80 percent chance of precipitation is forecast for the Bakersfield area Wednesday, with as much as three-fourths of an inch of rain called for over the Tejon Pass.

But as unwelcome news as that may be for anyone getting on Highway 99 for a holiday trek, it's good news in practically every other sense. For starters, it'll be a blessing for those fighting the massive, devastating Camp fire and other blazes around the state. Wet weather may not only help put out hot spots, but improve air quality that's been impacted by smoke for days.

An air quality alert from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District remains in effect due to smoke from the Camp fire in Butte County and the Alder/Mountaineer fires in Tulare County. The district is advising residents who smell smoke and see ash to limit their outdoor activity and remain inside air-conditioned buildings.

"The departure of stagnant high pressure and the onset of precipitation will bring welcome relief to poor air quality which has been plaguing portions of the West for weeks, as well as to help get the ongoing Camp fire in Northern California under control," according to a National Weather Service forecast.

"The rain may be moderate at times," the forecast said, "which could cause debris flows given fresh burn scars in portions of Northern California."

According to weather service, a couple Pacific storm systems will head through Northern California during the holiday period, the first expected to hit Central California Wednesday through Thursday. The second is forecast to drop more rain over the weekend.

Dense fog could spread in between the systems in the San Joaquin Valley as well as on Saturday and Sunday. Additionally, dense fog may occur in up-slope regions of the Sierra Nevada and Tehachapi mountains, according to the weather service.

In Bakersfield, less than a tenth of an inch of rainfall is in the forecast for Wednesday afternoon, with precipitation mainly occurring after 4 p.m. The evening could bring new precipitation amounts between a tenth and a quarter of an inch, with an 80 percent likelihood of rainfall, according to the weather service.

On Thanksgiving Day, the forecast calls for a 40 percent chance of rain with mostly cloudy conditions and a high near 61.

For those heading south, the Grapevine is expected to receive as much as half an inch of rain Wednesday evening, with a 30 percent chance of precipitation continuing into Thanksgiving Day.

"Be prepared for travel delays due not only to heavy traffic but wet roads," National Weather Service Meteorologist Cindy Bean said.

Snow levels will stay above 8,000 feet Wednesday, Bean said, but will come down to about 6,500 feet Thursday morning. That means snow will stay above pass levels, but those traveling off side roads into Pine Mountain Club and other mountain communities could encounter some snowfall.

Snowfall amounts in the Sierra Nevada will range from 6 to 15 inches above 7,000 feet, with up to 2 feet possible over the higher elevations.