

[Stockton Record Commentary, Friday, Aug. 10, 2018:](#)

Fitzgerald: Up in smoke: Stockton's summer days

By Michael Fitzgerald

In a case of good news but bad timing, The Washington Post ran a piece on cities with the most nice days. Stockton ranked eighth in the entire nation.

Lucky Stockton enjoys 89 nice days a year — “nice” being highs between 65 and 85 degrees, no rain, low winds, low humidity, not too many clouds.

I guess The Washington Post closed its California bureau.

Stockton is suffering its worst summer in living memory. Smoke from the Ferguson Fire and other wildfires has turned the air a thick, unhealthy grey. Meanwhile, relentless heat has soared to broiling highs and stayed there.

Worst. Summer. Ever.

“And I don’t know when it’s going to change,” said Jennifer Guenther with the National Weather Service. “I don’t see anything that looks like it’s going to break through.”

So far, Stockton this year has endured 23 days of temperatures 100 degrees or above. Normal, if there still is a normal, was 19 total for the year. We’ve exceeded our annual average and August isn’t half over. Not to mention September.

The 100-degree mark is arbitrary, too. If the heat is oscillating between 98 and 103 week upon week, it’s rough going. And the air quality ...

“Scratchy throat, watery eyes, slight headache, all the way to exacerbating asthma,” said Heather Heinks, a spokesperson for the Valley Air District.

“Even a very healthy person will find physical impacts for exposure to particular matter.”

Tiny particles of burned forest, so small they are measured in microns — a millionth of a meter — waft into the Valley. Held aloft by day, settling at night, stinging noses in the morning, they are concentrated far above normal levels.

How far above?

“They can exceed the total industrial and mobile emission you can see in the northern San Joaquin Valley,” Heinks said.

In other words, the smoke gets worse than all factories, and all cars, though we’re breathing all of them.

Being so minuscule, these particles “can get deep into your lungs, and some may even get into your bloodstream,” says the Environmental Protection Agency’s Particulate Matter Pollution Page.

That can hurt lungs and heart. As in, “premature death in people with heart or lung disease, nonfatal heart attacks, irregular heartbeat, aggravated asthma, decreased lung function ...”

The smoke also is affecting everything from tap water’s taste to time spent outside.

“We do encourage people to stay indoors and limit their outside activity,” an air official said Thursday on the radio.

In The Washington Post story, most top “nice days” cities were in California — Long Beach (1), Los Angeles (2), San Diego (3), other coastal cities, but also Fresno (7) and Stockton (8).

“The zone from Southern California north through the Central Valley clearly stands out as the region with the greatest frequency of ideal weather,” The Post wrote.

So Stockton sits in America’s ideal weather belt — the difference from L.A. being Angelenos bask in too many days without rain and must scabble for water.

Stockton’s way-big upside. And wildfires are spoiling it.

Capping the "ideal" temperature range at 85 is namby-pamby, by the way. For Stocktonians used to heat, a 90-degree day is no problem. We enjoy many more days — if not ideal, then close — than 89 a year, in my opinion.

Or we did. The last few years have been the hottest on record.

This paper's erstwhile environmental reporter, Alex Breittler, mining data from the Western Regional Climate Center, recently calculated that 51 of the past 54 months have been warmer than average.

That sounds like a trend. Climate change. Hotter days. More wildfires.

State officials, already serious about greenhouse gas reduction, should get serious about fire suppression, too.

Make reducing wildfires a top priority. Give us back nice days.

Unhealthy air quality likely to impact schools when class is back in session next week

By Reuben Contreras

ABC30, Thurs., Aug. 9, 2018

Playing fields in two of the biggest schools districts in the Central Valley are empty not just because it is summer break but due to unhealthy air quality.

Central and Fresno Unified Schools have moved or rescheduled practices for fall sports.

"Student safety is a paramount concern to us. So we always want to make sure that we're updating where the air quality is going and where it is currently. It's been going up and down. So we always want to stay on top of that," Sonja Dosti, Communications & Public Relations Officer for Central Unified.

Central Unified follows guidelines by the Valley Air District.

Practices for football and water polo have moved to the early morning but when school starts next week practices will be moved back to the afternoon.

"If they smell smoke or if they see smoke or if they see any type of ash falling, they have to treat it as a level four which is unhealthy," said Dosti.

At that point, the Central Unified moves most activities indoors or reduces the time frame for practice if it must remain outdoors. That also goes for recess and P.E. at elementary schools.

Fresno Unified was forced to move football practice earlier this week. But when school starts next week practice will move back to the afternoon and outdoors if possible.

"If we get into a situation where we go into a heat advisory or the air quality is unsafe then we cancel practices," said Brett Mar, Fresno Unified Athletic Manager.

Both districts cancel all outdoor activities at level five when air quality is considered hazardous.

And both districts will monitor conditions when the high school football season kicks off next Friday.

"Could be postponed, could be moved to a later time. It just depends on what happens. You never know what mother nature is going to do," said Mar.

As of Thursday games in districts are still on but if air quality remains poor a game-time decision will be made for a cancellation of postponement.

Wildfire smoke trapped in Valley prompts warning by health officials

By Calley Caderlof

Visalia Times-Delta, Thurs., Aug. 9, 2018

Blazing wildfires have surrounded the Central Valley, bringing with them thick smoke and unsafe air quality conditions.

The story has continued the length of summer.

As school starts, districts and health experts are having to look closer at the impacts.

Tulare County's air quality is currently "unhealthy" for sensitive groups, according to Tulare County Health and Human Services Agency.

Because of this, residents, especially those with health concerns, should take caution when outside, officials said.

"Community members should stay indoors and avoid exerting themselves," said Karen Haught, Tulare County Public Health officer. "Even healthy people may begin experiencing unhealthy symptoms due to wildfire smoke."

Wildfire smoke is a mixture of gases and fine, microscopic particles that can cause health problems including triggering asthma attacks, aggravating chronic heart and lung diseases, and increasing the risk of heart attack and stroke, according to San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials.

Much of Tulare County's wildfire smoke is from the Ferguson Fire, burning west of Yosemite National Park, air quality officials said.

As of Thursday morning, the blaze has torn through 95,104 acres and is at 79 percent containment.

The fire has been burning for 28 days.

"Smoke impacts will continue until the fire is extinguished," according to a statement released by air quality officials. "Anyone being exposed to poor air quality or wildfire smoke should move inside to an air-conditioned environment."

The Valley's triple degrees only make matters worse.

As of Thursday, Visalia has seen 27, 100-degree days in 2018. The typical annual average is 15, according to Scott Borgioli, WeatherAg chief meteorologist.

Last year, Visalia saw 50, 100-degree days, according to Borgioli.

"High temperatures will be around 100-104 (Thursday) and Friday then around 100 for the weekend into early next week," he said. "These hot temperatures are compliments of strong and persistent high pressure over the southwest region."

Because of the heavy smoke, some residents should take greater caution when heading outside.

Who is at greatest risk from wildfire smoke?

- People who have heart or lung diseases, like heart disease, chest pain, lung disease, or asthma
- Older adults are more likely to be affected by smoke. This may be due to their increased risk of heart and lung diseases.
- Children are more likely to be affected by health threats from smoke. Children's airways are still developing and they breathe more air per pound of body weight than adults. Also, children often spend more time outdoors engaged in activity and play.

Protect yourself from wildfire smoke dangers

- Keep windows and doors closed, use your air conditioner if you have one and keep the fresh-air intake closed.
- Use the recirculate option on your vehicle air conditioner.
- Avoid using gas stoves and vacuuming as these add to indoor pollution.
- Follow your doctor's advice about medicines and your respiratory management plan.
- Ask your physician if it is safe for you to wear an "N95" mask. Properly worn, it may offer some protection and can be found at local hardware stores. Dust masks or paper comfort masks won't provide protection for your lungs from smoke.