

Windy conditions spread fire in Del Puerto Canyon, bring ash and smoke to Modesto area

By Patty Guerra

Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-star, Wed., Aug., 19, 2020

Fires burning in the hills west of Modesto continued to grow overnight, but firefighters have built some containment lines that are holding, authorities said Wednesday. Hot, windy conditions are making the fire harder to control and spreading ash and smoke for miles.

The Del Puerto Canyon fire is burning near Patterson in western Stanislaus County. The fire is part of what Cal Fire is calling the SCU Lightning Complex, more than a dozen wildfires that have burned 85,000 acres with 5% containment as of Wednesday morning. The Del Puerto Canyon fire is part of Canyon Zone fires, which have consumed 25,000 acres.

Two first-responder injuries have been reported, and Stanislaus County Sheriff Jeff Dirkse said in a Facebook post Tuesday night that two structures have burned.

Heavy winds pushed the fire overnight, Cal Fire said in a news release issued Wednesday morning. The recent heat wave, with higher nighttime temperatures than normal for this time of year, also has made it harder for crews to make much headway.

“Westerly onshore winds are forecasted to increase today, and while temperatures will be a few degrees cooler with slightly higher humidity, those changes will be negated by the stronger onshore flow,” the news release said.

Those winds also have blown smoke and ash in to the Northern San Joaquin Valley, where air officials issued a health alert and people reported seeing ash falling as far east as Empire.

Residents in the area have been evacuated, and those in the Diablo Grande community have been advised to leave as well.

On Wednesday, Stanislaus County Sheriff’s deputies plan to try to escort some ranchers into the evacuated area to check on their livestock, Dirkse said in his post Tuesday.

In all, 578 firefighters are battling the blaze, according to Cal Fire. On Wednesday, “crews will continue to scout for safe access points in order to construct direct and indirect fire line, mitigate the ongoing structure threat and provide continued recon for any new fire starts.”

Wildfire smoke chokes Bay Area, with air quality ‘very poor for the foreseeable future’

By Kate Galbraith

San Francisco Chronicle, Wednesday, August 19, 2020

Smoke from wildfires raging around the region covered much of the Bay Area on Wednesday, creating unhealthy air conditions and triggering several alerts.

“The air quality will be very poor for the foreseeable future given rapid spread of fires and stagnant air mass,” the Bay Area arm of the National Weather Service tweeted on Wednesday morning around 7:40 a.m.

Air district authorities issued a Spare the Air alert through Wednesday, banning wood burning, and an air quality advisory through Thursday.

The smell of smoke hovered over many areas including San Francisco, with a National Weather Service worker even reporting ash downtown.

“The smoke is everywhere now,” said Kristina Chu, acting communications manager for the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, on Wednesday morning

In particular, she said the SCU Lightning Complex fire raging in the eastern Bay Area was generating huge amounts of smoke. “The SCU Lightning Complex fire is still not even remotely contained,” she said. “That’s causing the biggest amount of smoke in the Bay area, covering five counties.”

As of Wednesday morning, the wildfire consisted of 20 separate blazes in rugged terrain in Santa Clara, Alameda, Contra Costa, San Joaquin and Stanislaus counties, according to a Cal Fire incident report. It had burned 85,000 acres and was 5% contained.

As of 6 a.m., the highest (worst) reading in the Bay Area for fine particles were in Pleasanton., Redwood City and Gilroy, where air quality was rated unhealthy. (Data from air monitors is available only after a few hours' lag.) Air in San Francisco was rated moderate, but had been worsening and was on the verge of being rated "unhealthy for sensitive groups" — a rating that already applied to East Oakland.

The air quality advisory means that anyone with pre-existing respiratory issues should limit all outdoor activity. If you smell smoke, "go inside, close windows and doors and make sure they're sealed," Chu said.

If indoor temperatures are too high for those sheltering in place, Chu said, "We recommend checking your local and county offices for a cooling center around you so you can be healthy and safe."

Chu also emphasized that only certain kinds of masks will protect wearers from fine particles called PM2.5. "Everybody right now is under a mask order for COVID," she said. "However, any mask that is not an N95 or higher will not do anything to protect you from PM2.5 particles from wildfire smoke."

People can still wear their coronavirus protection masks outdoors, but if they don't have N95 masks, "We recommend staying inside to avoid wildfire smoke," she said.

Chu said the cooler weather expected on Thursday could help improve air quality by bringing in cleaner air from the ocean and creating better conditions for fire containment.

"We hope as temperatures come down a little bit in our inland pockets around the region, and as onshore winds start to pick up, that those combinations will help with fire containment around the Bay Area," she said.

Smoke blankets the Lodi area as wildfires burn throughout state

By K. Cathey

Lodi News-Sentinel, Wednesday, Aug. 19, 2020

Lodians on Wednesday woke to pale reddish sunlight attempting to shine through a smoke-blanketed sky, and a fine dusting of ash coating surfaces throughout the city.

The city -- and most of San Joaquin County -- is surrounded by some of the dozens of wildfires burning throughout the state, including the SCU Lightning Complex burning in San Joaquin and four other counties, which had grown to 85,000 acres in just under 24 hours since it began on Tuesday, and the fast-growing LNU Lightning Complex in Solano, Napa, Sonoma and Yolo counties.

Air quality was poor in Lodi on Wednesday morning, according to AccuWeather, a private weather forecasting firm.

Winds from the northwest have been blowing smoke from the LNU Complex into the Lodi area, said Randy Adkins, a senior meteorologist with AccuWeather. While the wind is expected to shift so that it is coming first from the west, then from the southwest, any relief will likely be shortlived. The SCU complex and several other fires are raging southwest of Lodi.

"It does look like you will be dealing with smoke for the next couple of days at the very least," Adkins said.

The air quality might improve just a little before the winds shift completely, but by Friday, the wind will most likely be bringing smoke from those fires to the southwest into the area, he said.

While the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's Real-time Air Advisory Network showed OK air quality for Lodi, Heather Heinks, the district's outreach and communications manager, warned that the monitors only pick up small particulate pollution, not ash or heavier particles.

"The see and smell test should always prevail over what you see on a monitor," she said.

The entire Lodi area is under a health caution due to the wildfire smoke despite the RAAN readings, she said.

"If you can, at all costs, stay inside during this time," Heinks said.

Employers should be following state guidelines for working in smoke if any of their employees need to work outdoors, she added.

Heinks urged local residents to check and, if needed, change the air filters in their homes.

"Check the one in your car, too," she said.

She also urged residents to check on their neighbors and loved ones, especially the elderly and anyone with health problems.

Adkins seconded the recommendation to stay indoors. If possible, he said, close your windows and run air conditioning. Air conditioners are likely to bring a little smoke inside, he said, but it's better than opening the windows and people need to stay cool during the heat wave.

Another thing to keep in mind is that the cloth masks most area residents are wearing to prevent the spread of COVID-19 cannot filter out small particulate pollution, Heinks said. Residents should not assume that their pandemic masks will offer any protection against the smoke outdoors, unless they are specifically rated for pollution use.

The Cal Fire website briefly went down on Wednesday morning due to the number of people attempting to access it. It briefly came back up around 10:20 a.m. before going down again around 11:30 a.m.

Cal Fire has issued a Red Flag Warning for the Central Valley through Thursday evening, meaning high temperatures, low humidity and winds are raising the risk of fire danger.

The high pressure system that has brought a sweltering heat wave to the Lodi area is also trapping the smoke in the Valley, Heinks said.

As of Wednesday morning, the largest group of fires on Cal Fire's incidents page was the SCU Lightning Complex, with at least 20 blazes burning 85,000 acres in Santa Clara, Alameda, Contra Costa, San Joaquin and Stanislaus counties. The fires were 5% contained.

"Some of the terrain has little to no fire history with decadent fuels conducive to extreme fire growth," Cal Fire reported on its website. "Overnight, crews saw critical rates of spread and medium range spotting. Increasing west winds tested containment lines in all zones and had crews actively engaged in structure protection."

Western San Joaquin County residents were not being asked to evacuate on Wednesday morning, but residents in portions of the other four counties were under mandatory evacuation orders or warnings. An evacuation center had been set up at the Santa Clara County Sheriff's Office in San Jose.

The LNU Lightning Complex in Napa, Sonoma, Yolo and Solano counties is at zero containment with more than 46,000 acres burned as of Wednesday morning, according to Cal Fire. The Ulatis Community Center was serving as an evacuation center, with the Solano County Fairgrounds in Vallejo temporarily housing large animals, and the county animal shelter making room for displaced small pets.

Part of the city of Vacaville was under mandatory evacuation orders as one of the LNU Complex fires raced toward it from the northwest.

"The fire came so fast in the Pleasants Valley Road area that several families barely escaped, and one was trapped for hours in a field before they could find an opening to get out," the Sacramento Bee reported on Wednesday morning.

Additional nearby wildfires include the Salt Fire near Salt Spring Reservoir just east of Jackson, which is 10% contained as of Wednesday morning after burning 1,500 acres; the CZU Lightning Complex in Santa Cruz and San Mateo counties, which has burned 10,000 acres and is uncontained; and the Dolan, River and Carmel fires in Monterey County. The River Fire, the largest of the three, is 7% contained after burning more than 10,000 acres on Wednesday morning.

While the fires are destructive and bad for the air, they are likely to have one small benefit.

"It likely will prevent temperatures from getting as hot as they otherwise would," Adkins said. Whenever the air fills with particulate matter, whether smoke, dust or something else, it tends to slightly lower the temperature closer to the ground, he said.

That said, the wildfires are dangerous, and anyone thinking of going to see them up close should think twice, Adkins said.

He has seen videos of people trying to approach the fires and drive through them for the thrill of it. Getting that close to a massive fire puts anyone in the car in danger, he said, especially since it's easier to get turned around or lost in thick smoke. It also endangers the first responders who then need to rescue the lost car and get its passengers to safety.

For air quality information, visit www.valleyair.org. For updates from Cal Fire, visit www.fire.ca.gov.

Wildfire smoke hangs over Tracy as heat wave continues

Press staff report

Tracy Press, Tuesday, August 18, 2020

Update

On Tuesday morning, Cal Fire grouped together 20 separate fires started by lightning strikes across the area covered by the Santa Clara Unit as the SCU Lightning Complex Incident.

They include the Canyon Zone fires in the hills near Patterson in Stanislaus County; the Calaveras Zone fires in Alameda, Santa Clara and Stanislaus counties; and the Deer Zone fires near Mount Diablo State Park and Round Valley Regional Preserve in Contra Costa County.

As of 8 a.m., all the fires together had consumed 25,000 acres, and Cal Fire has not yet established any containment lines. The fires are burning through areas of steep, inaccessible terrain, and firefighters must contend with triple-digit daytime temperatures and fast-moving flames.

Cal Fire has not given a time frame for full containment of the fires.

A smoky haze from grass fires burning out of control in the hills near Patterson hangs over Tracy as the region swelters in a triple-digit heat wave that has triggered widespread rolling blackouts and air-quality warnings.

A group of four fires designated by Cal Fire as the Canyon Zone Fire is burning in Del Puerto Canyon northwest of Patterson, about 21 miles southeast of the intersection of 11th Street and Tracy Boulevard.

The fire burned through Sunday night, and brown smoke had crept over Tracy by Monday afternoon, giving the sun a red-orange hue. As of 4:14 p.m., Cal Fire estimated that 1,851 acres had burned and the fires were still entirely uncontrolled.

The Stanislaus County Sheriff's Office has issued mandatory evacuation orders for people who live on Del Puerto Canyon Road from Frank Raines Park to Mines Road.

Another group of grass fires near Mount Diablo State Park on Deer Valley and Marsh Creek roads, dubbed the Deer Zone Fires, has consumed 1,161 acres since Sunday and is also burning out of control. Those fires were sparked by lightning.

People across Tracy reported ash falling in their neighborhoods Monday afternoon.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District cautioned valley residents to stay out of the smoky air caused by those wildfires and other fires farther south near Turlock, Fresno County and Los Angeles.

The air district warned that microscopic particles in the smoke can trigger asthma, aggravate chronic bronchitis, and increase the risk of heart attack and stroke. Young children, older adults, and anyone with existing respiratory conditions, including COVID-19, are especially at risk from this type of air pollution.

Anyone who can smell smoke or see falling ash should consider the air unhealthy. The best response is to move indoors to a filtered, air-conditioned environment and keep windows closed.

The air district emphasized that cloth and paper masks used to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 via respiratory droplets are not sufficient to filter out the microscopic particles that make up smoke.

At the same time, an extreme heat wave has brought triple-digit temperatures and warnings of rolling blackouts.

A statewide flex alert calling for everyone to conserve electricity was issued Sunday and continues through Wednesday. Temperatures are expected to peak over 100 degrees each day, driving electricity demand higher in the late afternoon and early evening, just as the sun sinks and solar power generation becomes less efficient. In response, people are asked to turn off unnecessary lights; use major appliances in the morning or later at night; and, health permitting, keep thermostats at 78 degrees or higher between 3 and 10 p.m.

Flex alerts are issued by the California Independent System Operator, which oversees the state's bulk electrical power system, transmission lines and electricity market. The goal is to prevent rolling blackouts and other emergency measures.

Pacific Gas & Electric Co. notified customers by a recorded voice message that rolling blackouts were possible in the area through Wednesday at the discretion of Cal ISO. The blackouts could last up to two hours until the demand on the power grid stabilizes.

A similar alert was issued Friday, followed by a Stage 3 Electrical Emergency, the first declared since the 2001 energy crisis.

Accuweather forecasts Tracy's high temperatures to remain in the triple digits through Wednesday, cooling into the high 90s on Thursday but immediately rebounding to triple-digit heat Friday through Monday.

Escape the Heat

The city of Tracy has designated the Tracy Transit Station as a cooling zone for anyone who needs a place to get out of the heat.

- The station, at the intersection of Central Avenue and Sixth Street, will be open more hours in response to the extreme heat wave: Monday through Friday: 8 a.m.-7 p.m.
- Saturday: 10 a.m.-6 p.m.
- Sunday: 11 a.m.-7 p.m. (when the forecast is 100 degrees or higher; otherwise closed as usual)

Rides on the Tracer bus line's fixed routes, which all stop at the transit station, are free on any day when the temperature is forecast to reach 100 degrees or higher.

Social distancing, careful hygiene and face coverings are urged for anyone taking the bus or sheltering from the heat at the station.

For more information: www.ridetracer.com or 831-4BUS (831-4287)

Lightning fires continue to prompt evacuations in multiple counties northwest of Patterson

by: Kay Recede

KTXL Fox40 News, Tues., Aug. 18, 2020

STANISLAUS COUNTY, Calif. (KTXL) — Fire crews continue to battle the SCU Lightning Complex, a collection of at least 20 fires that have affected at least five counties in the region northwest of Patterson.

By Tuesday afternoon, at least 25,000 acres had burned. The sky above Patterson was still very hazy, making it hard to breathe and see in the area.

Hotspots still lingered throughout Del Puerto Canyon after a fire sparked 4 a.m. Sunday, affecting San Joaquin and Stanislaus counties.

"I feel sorry for the people that are out there. I hear they're being evacuated now. It's terrible," Newman resident Susan Wells told FOX40.

The fires have prompted evacuation orders for Frank Raines Park to Mines Road, Del Puerto Canyon Road 1 mile to Mines Road, Welch Creek Road, Marsh Creek Road round valley to Morgan Territory, all of Morgan Territory and March Creek mobile home park. Killcare and Mill Creek roads are under warnings.

In Stanislaus County, families said they've come to expect this reality almost every summer.

"Every year we have fires; this isn't the first fire up in this area," Wells said.

But dealing with each and every fire and the evacuations that come with it they said is always surreal.

"I feel bad for all the families that have to evacuate and stuff. That's terrible," said Patterson resident Aaron Hernandez.

Cal Fire spokesman Jake Miller told FOX40 over the phone that the steep hills and the current heat advisory impacting California are posing a challenge to fire crews.

"Just makes it very difficult for crews to work out there just because of the heat and it's also very conducive to fire behavior," Miller explained.

Miller said firefighters train and are prepared for these conditions and are working to get the upper hand.

"Getting the crews a lot of fluid and making sure that they're rested overnight," Miller said.

As the haze and smoke continue to make its way into neighborhoods, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District advises families to remain inside, especially as temperatures continue to rise above 100 degrees.

"Miserable. It makes it totally miserable," Wells said.

There was an evacuation center that was set up but a Stanislaus County official told FOX40 that no one used it Monday night. The official said that if there are families who may need shelter, the county will reopen a site.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish mentions the Health Caution the Air District issued yesterday due to wildfire smoke impacting the Valley.](#)

Emiten alerta por mala calidad del aire en el Valle Central debido a múltiples focos de incendios

Al menos 15 focos de incendios se registran durante esta jornada en California, cuya contención se ha visto dificultada por las altas temperaturas que sacuden al estado.

Univision.com, Monday, Aug. 17, 2020

FRESNO, California.- A raíz de los diferentes incendios que azotan el estado, el Distrito de Calidad del Aire del Valle de San Joaquín emitió una advertencia de salud para los residentes del área, la cual se mantendrá vigente hasta que los siniestros sean controlados.

Por el momento son seis los focos de incendios que están afectando la calidad del aire del Valle del San Joaquín, pero al menos 15 en todo el estado. En el condado de Los Ángeles, el incendio Lake ha consumido más de 18 mil acres y su contención es del 31%, mientras que por el noroeste llega el humo proveniente del incendio Dee Zone, entre los condados de Contra Costa y Stockton.

Un incendio que lleva más de dos días es el incendio forestal Hills, al sur de Coalinga, en el condado de Fresno, el cual ha consumido casi 1,000 acres y los bomberos reportan un 18% de contención de las llamas.

Canyon Fire, ubicado en el condado de Stanislaus cerca de Turlock, también está causando problemas en la calidad del aire. Y es que las partículas contaminantes se infiltran y concentran en la cuenca del Valle de San Joaquín, que incluye los condados de Stanislaus, Merced, San Joaquín, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare y la porción del valle del condado de Kern.

La contaminación por estas partículas puede desencadenar ataques de asma, agravar la bronquitis crónica y aumentar el riesgo de ataque cardíaco y accidente cerebrovascular.

Las autoridades explican que las estaciones de monitoreo suelen detectar partículas microscópicas de PM 2.5 que existen en el humo . Sin embargo, es posible que otras partículas más grandes, como las cenizas, no sean detectadas.

"Si huele humo o ve cenizas que caen en sus inmediaciones, considere la calidad del aire como "insalubre" (nivel 4 de RAAN o superior) incluso si el nivel de contaminación de RAAN (Red de asesoramiento de aire en tiempo real) es menor.

Los funcionarios del Distrito de la Calidad del Aire del Valle de San Joaquín advierten que cualquiera que experimente una mala calidad del aire debido al humo de los incendios forestales debe trasladarse al interior, a un ambiente con aire acondicionado y filtrado con las ventanas cerradas.

A las 3pm de este lunes, la concentración de ozono en el aire alcanza los 103 ppb, muy cerca del nivel 5. Los niveles de PM 2.5 se mantienen en un nivel moderado, sin embargo puede que las cenizas no sean detectadas como material microscópico contaminante.

Mientras los incendios no sean controlados, se mantiene vigente la advertencia de salud. Por su parte, el Servicio de Meteorología de Hanford reiteró temperaturas máximas de hasta 113°F en algunas zonas del Valle Central para toda esta semana.