

Fresno fireworks started fires and ruined air quality. A heat wave will bring more issues

By Carmen George

The Fresno Bee, Monday, July 05, 2021

Fourth of July fireworks started vegetation fires in Fresno County and ruined air quality.

"We went off the chart," said Jaime Holt, a spokesperson for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, about particulate matter (PM 2.5) in Fresno's air Sunday night.

PM 2.5 levels spiked far above level five, considered "very unhealthy" by the district, starting around 9 p.m., data from an air monitor in central Fresno shows. Holt lives in that area and described the sound of illegal fireworks igniting around her home "like a war zone."

Even short periods of exposure to high levels of PM 2.5 is harmful, especially for the elderly, young children, smokers, and those with medical conditions like asthma. People at less risk might have still had trouble breathing because of the large amount of illegal fireworks, or woken up with a sore throat and itchy, watery eyes, Holt said.

Breathing bad air can contribute to developing cardiovascular disease and dementia later in life, she added.

Confiscated fireworks and fires started by fireworks

A Fresno fireworks task force of police and firefighters reported confiscating over 100 pounds of illegal fireworks and issuing over 40 citations over the Fourth of July holiday, as of the latest count on Monday afternoon.

Cal Fire Fresno County spokesman Dan Urias said six of 19 vegetation fires that Cal Fire responded to on Sunday across the county were related to fireworks. The fires were "relatively small." The department also responded to two structure fires.

The largest of the 19 wildfires was the Fish Fire south of Pine Flat Lake. Its cause is under investigation. The Fish Fire grew to 75 acres and was fully contained Monday.

Urias said Cal Fire Fresno County confiscated 45 pounds of illegal fireworks on Sunday and issued two citations.

Hotter weather coming to Valley, Sierra, Yosemite

Holt said PM 2.5 levels in Fresno have returned to about normal, with the worst spike between late Sunday and early Monday. However, ozone levels, another measure of air quality, are expected to worsen later this week with a heat wave expected to hit the central San Joaquin Valley and Sierra Nevada.

Temperatures are expected to reach 106 degrees or higher in Yosemite Valley from Friday through Tuesday, the National Weather Service office in Hanford forecast.

The 400-acre Blue Fire, started last week south of Shaver Lake, is no longer listed by the air district on its website as impacting air quality in the Valley.

Cash rebates available for buying electric yard equipment

By Gene Garaygordobil, The Record

The Delano Record, Saturday, July 3, 2021

Valley residents can receive cash back and help improve air quality and quality of life by replacing gas-powered yard care equipment with zero-emission, electric alternatives through the Valley Air District's Clean Green Yard Machines: Residential Program (CGYM).

CGYM continues to grow, with funding widely available to help valley residents go electric and save money when trading in their old gas mowers. Plus, the program now offers cash rebates for purchasing a

variety of residential, electric yard care tools instead of their gas-powered counterparts, reducing air pollution in neighborhoods across the valley.

Participants receive up to \$250 when trading in a gas mower in favor of electric and up to \$50 when making a straight purchase (no trade-in) of electric mowers and other electric yard care equipment such as edgers, trimmers, chainsaws and pole saws.

In addition, residents in the AB 617 communities of South Central Fresno and Shafter are eligible for a 100 percent rebate on electric mowers, up to \$500, when trading in a gas mower and purchasing electric.

Gas-powered yard care equipment presents a significant source of localized air pollution in valley neighborhoods as these small engines contain no emission controls and pollute substantially more than newer passenger vehicles. Statistic: One gas mower produces the equivalent in emissions of 12 late-model cars operating for the same length of time.

Interested Valley residents should visit www.valleyair.org/CGYM for program guidelines before purchasing new equipment and check their address to see if they qualify for enhanced funding available to residents in AB 617 communities.

For questions, email: grants@valleyair.org, or speak to air district staff, call 559-230-5800.

Air pollution control district urges restraint for personal fireworks on the Fourth of July

Press staff report

Tracy Press, Friday, July 2, 2021

Officials at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District are asking valley residents to avoid using personal fireworks on the Fourth of July if possible and go to professional fireworks shows instead to help protect air quality.

During a Monday news conference, Anthony Presto, an outreach and communication representative with the district, said every year the air quality spikes into the very unhealthy range as residents discharge safe and sane fireworks during the evening hours to celebrate Independence Day.

"This is something that happens every year around this time, as you know. Fireworks can really impact air quality," Presto said.

He said Valley Air measures the fine particulate matter at 2.5 microns and smaller in the summer months in smoke from wildfires and on the Fourth of July.

"What takes place every year around this time is we reach unhealthy levels of particulate matter pollution on the evening of Fourth of July, and this really impacts a lot of folks," Presto said. "The folks that are the most sensitive will be impacted first obviously — people with emphysema, chronic bronchitis, COPD, asthma, the elderly and children whose lungs are still developing. They are going to be hit the hardest and obviously feel it before a general healthy adult. Now when we get into the unhealthy levels that we see on the Fourth of July, everybody is impacted."

PM 2.5 matter from fireworks includes soot, ash and some metals. Fine particulate matter can invade the bloodstream, enter deep into the lungs and increase the chance of stroke and heart attack.

The district has monitored the air quality during Fourth of July holidays in the past with their Real-time Air Advisory Network and discovered air quality levels sometimes four or five times higher than the federal health-based standard, especially at times of the day when fireworks are discharged. Officials said the high levels usually have dissipated by the next morning.

He cautioned that the fireworks bring other pollution danger other than just smoke.

"It's also other toxics, because fireworks have heavy metals in them so you're not just breathing smoke. There's a lot of toxics being introduced to your body, which makes it worse."

The district urged residents to avoid discharging fireworks at home and instead enjoy professional fireworks show in the area.

“These professional fireworks shows are much more spectacular, you can see them from miles away, and they are so high in an elevation the impact is not as great on us down here at ground level,” Presto said. “Those are able to dissipate before they hit the ground in most cases, so the impact is very small whereas personal fireworks are creating so much smoke down here at ground level where we’re all breathing it in.”

If residents do light safe and sane fireworks the district advised residents to use only half the amount they were planning on lighting as a way to ease air quality concerns.

“You don’t have to light fireworks to be patriotic,” Presto said.

Along with the fireworks concerns, the district said smoke from wildfires burning in Arizona may begin to impact the Southern San Joaquin Valley, while fires burning in Kern and Fresno counties led to a health caution issued Monday for residents in the valley.

Officials cautioned that common paper and cloth masks used for COVID-19 may not be effective in filtering the fine particulate matter in the smoke and anyone experiencing poor air quality should move indoors to a filtered, air-conditioned area.

For more information on the Real-time Air Advisory Network visit myRAAN.com, and for more information on air quality safety visit www.valleyair.org.