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Attn: Local news, business and assignment editors

Northern region – Modesto

Anthony Presto (209) 557-6472

Central/Southern regions – Fresno

Heather Heinks (559) 230-5898

Spanish-language contact

Maricela Velasquez (559) 230-5849

New AQI Scale scoring for the 8-hour ozone standard ***District's Real-time Air Advisory Network (RAAN) continues to provide most health protective information***

As required by federal law, the Valley Air District has adopted an updated health-protective scoring system set in place by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Each day, the District publishes an air quality index forecast (AQI) that indicates expected air quality conditions in the San Joaquin Valley. In addition to complying with this requirement, the District continues to provide and promote its advanced and more health protective air quality tool, the Real-time Air Advisory Network (RAAN) system, which provides Valley schools, parents and the general public with real-time access to hour-by-hour local air quality conditions.

EPA established this AQI scale nationally to provide a consistent way to report and understand air quality across the country. In October 2015, EPA lowered the federal 8-hour ozone standard from 75 parts per billion (ppb) to 70 ppb and in turn changed the AQI scale. Under the new EPA scoring system, days that previously were classified as “good” air days (0-50 AQI) may now be ranked as “moderate”, and some “moderate” days may now be ranked as “unhealthy for sensitive groups”. The formulas used for calculating AQI are tied to the national ambient air quality standards set by EPA for each pollutant. Therefore, as standards change, the calculated AQI changes accordingly.

As a result, it can easily be perceived that air quality is getting worse, when in fact over the last three decades, air quality in the Valley has significantly improved. Despite strings of triple digits temperatures and multiple wildfires, the Valley had another record setting cleaner summer for ozone in 2015. Additionally, the Valley had the lowest number of days exceeding the current federal 75 ppb 8-hour ozone standard, and for the first time in recorded history the Valley had zero unhealthy days in the month of July for ozone. Furthermore, the Valley also meets the national ambient air quality standards for carbon monoxide and PM10.

With the recent EPA action to reset the AQI scale, the District will begin a focused public outreach effort to help the public avoid confusion with the new AQI while encouraging the utilization of the District's more health-protective RAAN system. To view localized, hourly air quality data from the District's extensive air monitoring network, visit www.valleyair.org/RAAN or download the free “valley air” iPhone app.

For more information about the Air District, call a regional office in Fresno (559-230-6000), Modesto (209-557-6400) or Bakersfield (661-392-5500).