

SJV air district calls 'Air Alert' Aug. 23-28 for eight counties

Sun-Star Staff

Merced Sun-Star, Monday, August 22, 2011

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution District said the Valley air basin is in an Air Alert from Tuesday, Aug. 23 to Sunday, Aug. 28. This includes the counties of Merced, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and portions of Kern.

The Air Alert is being called because the Valley is experiencing conditions, such as increased emissions load, high temperatures and stagnant air flow, that lead to ozone formation. High ozone levels put the Valley at risk for exceeding health-based ozone standards that in turn trigger federal monetary penalties.

Residents can reduce smog-forming emissions by:

· Refraining from idling when dropping off/picking up students · Carpooling, vanpooling or alternate transportation · Refraining from using drive-through services
Businesses and municipalities can reduce emissions by:

· Shifting operations to early morning or late evening (lawn care) · Offering flexible work schedules · Promoting carpools and vanpools for employees · Implementing telecommuting · Becoming a Healthy Air Living Partner

For more information about Air Alerts, please visit:

http://www.valleyair.org/AirAlert/AirAlert_Landing.htm. To sign up for a free subscription to the Air Alert email notification system please visit <http://www.valleyair.org/lists/list.htm>. To receive information about becoming a Healthy Air Living Partner, please visit www.healthyairliving.com.

Drivers encouraged to stay in the zone

Less exhaust in S.J. County could curb need for air-quality fee

By Alex Breitler

Stockton Record, Monday August 22, 2011

Unlike most new fees and taxes, this one might actually go away - if residents heed a new alert system when air quality deteriorates.

Starting next month, San Joaquin Valley motorists will pay an extra \$12 when they register their vehicles.

Why? Ozone pollution exceeded federal standards on seven days last year, triggering a \$29 million penalty from the federal government.

Air aware

Officials plan to announce the first Air Alert today under a new outreach program by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

During an Air Alert, the public is asked to:

- Carpool to work or school
- Consider riding a bike, walking or taking mass transit
- Link errands together instead of making multiple trips from home
- Avoid idling the car when picking children up from school

- Avoid drive-through businesses

Longer-term goals include asking schools to push back school-year start dates and stagger the times at which children are released each afternoon.

To learn more, visit www.valleyair.org or call (800) 766-4463.

The Valley Air Pollution Control District assigned the majority of that penalty to motorists, because cars and trucks account for about 80 percent of the ozone-pollution problem.

But the district also is launching an Air Alert campaign which, if successful, could wipe the \$12 DMV fee off the books.

It'll take three years without a single ozone violation to do the trick.

And that'll take your cooperation, the district says.

Air-quality officials believe a combination of summertime heat and back-to-school traffic triggers the mid-afternoon ozone violations.

They can't do much about the heat, so they're asking parents - especially during an Air Alert - to carpool or even walk their children to school. And if they do drive, they're asked not to idle their vehicles while they wait.

It doesn't stop with parents or their children. The public at large can help by carpooling to work or avoiding drive-through restaurants, among other strategies.

"We hope to start getting the public to do what they can," said Seyed Sadredin, the air district's director. "We're trying to encourage some voluntary actions."

And in an admittedly ambitious goal, the district is asking school districts to consider pushing start dates back until after Labor Day in the future, and to stagger the times at which students are released each afternoon.

The first Air Alert will be announced today, the district said, as additional students in the south Valley return to school and temperatures tick upward.

You may see the alert on TV, you may hear it on the radio, and you might get a few tweets or Facebook posts, too. The district hopes to also post Air Alert warnings on digital freeway signs in the future.

The \$50,000 campaign is reminiscent of the old Spare the Air program, which the district abandoned several years ago.

Spare the Air warned the public of spikes in a number of pollutants, and the warnings became so frequent that people eventually stopped noticing them, said Jaime Holt, an air district spokeswoman.

Air Alerts, on the other hand, will be called only two or three times a year, she said, perhaps lasting three to seven days at a time.

So far 2011 has been clean, without any hourly ozone violations.

Last year, too, things were looking good in mid-August. As school started the district issued a public plea to reduce driving, but the Valley still ended the year with seven violations.

And for the first time, the \$29 million penalty kicked in, even though the standard in question has actually been revoked - an irony that air district officials say is unfair. They're seeking Congressional support to change the law.

Although the air near Stockton is typically cleaner than Fresno or Bakersfield, cutting down on driving here will help stymie pollution farther south, Holt said.

And, of course, north Valley drivers are subject to the \$12 fee just like everyone else. A violation down south means we keep paying up north.

Sadredin said the district is hoping to get interest from at least some school districts about shifting start dates later in the summer for future school years.

Holt said those discussions will be held with county offices of education. A spokeswoman for the San Joaquin County Office of Education said that office had not yet been contacted.