

August ozone level stays low; air district says levels below critical limits

By Donna-Marie Sonnichsen

Visalia Times-Delta & Tulare Advance-Register, Monday, Sept. 5, 2011

Notorious Valley air quality got a little cleaner last month and the credit goes to the public, according to air district officials.

In August, for the first time, Valley air did not exceed critical ozone standards.

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials say the public's response to Air Alerts helped keep ozone levels below the health-based limit — which is set at 125 parts per billion.

Air Alerts are declared when conditions may lead to ozone formation that goes beyond the one-hour set limit. Typically, they coincide with the start of the school year and the resulting increase in traffic.

Reducing vehicle use is one of the most important ways the public and businesses can reduce emissions during an Air Alert, officials said in a news report Friday.

When the standard is exceeded, financial penalties are imposed, which are paid through fees on Valley businesses and residents.

"This is a historic accomplishment for which the Valley's residents and businesses can take credit," said Seyed Sadredin, the air district's executive director and air pollution control officer.

Air district officials are currently trying to repeal last year's \$29 million penalty for exceeding smog standards.

"This penalty does not recognize the incredible improvements we have made across-the-board in our air quality," Sadredin said.

The Valley air basin exceeded the limit 18 times in August 1996, twice in August 2010 and, for the first time, not once this August.

The public can also help reduce smog by turning off vehicles while dropping off and picking up students, carpooling and avoiding drive-throughs.

Some of the ways that businesses and municipalities can do their part are promoting carpools, implementing telecommuting or offering flexible work schedules, and doing lawn care early morning or late evening.

Air alert in Valley; restricted driving urged

By Bethany Clough, staff writer

The Fresno Bee, Monday, Sept. 5, 2011

Air officials are calling on Valley residents to cut back on driving and idling while an air alert is in effect this week.

The alert -- called when the area is in danger of exceeding a federal standard for ozone -- started Monday and will run through Thursday or possibly Friday, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

It's the second air alert of the season. The first, in late August, successfully avoided an ozone violation. The district declared the month one of the cleanest Augusts on record thanks to actions by Valley residents and businesses.

The program was started this year as a way for residents and businesses to help avoid a one-hour ozone violation and a potential \$29 million fine. Residents would pay that fine through an extra \$12 tacked onto their vehicle registration.

The air district is asking people not to idle their cars when picking up or dropping off students, and to skip drive-throughs, to carpool or to use an alternate form of transportation.

Businesses can reduce emissions by shifting some operations, such as lawn care, to early mornings or late evenings, offering flexible work schedules and telecommuting, and promoting carpools.

These moves prevent the formation of ozone, a corrosive gas that forms on hot days when vehicle exhaust combines with fumes from gasoline, dairies and solvents.

A reading over 125 parts per billion of ozone triggers a violation. By midafternoon Monday, the district's website showed a reading of 92 parts per billion.

Temperatures are expected to hit a high of 98 today, 100 on Wednesday, 99 on Thursday and 97 on Friday, according to the National Weather Service.

An area of high pressure sitting over the Valley makes for stagnant air that contributes to the problem, said meteorologist Jim Dudley.

"Until we get a new front moving through or some big change in the air mass, we could continue to have problems," he said.

Officials: Drive less this week

By The Record

Stockton Record, Monday, Sept. 5, 2011

San Joaquin Valley air quality officials will call their second "Air Alert" today as ozone levels throughout the Valley are expected to climb.

Residents are asked to carpool to work or school, to refrain from idling their vehicles and to avoid using drive-through services.

The Valley has yet to violate a federal one-hour ozone standard this summer, which is good news for drivers saddled with a new \$12 DMV fee. But the Valley needs three summers without a violation before the fee can be erased.

Warm temperatures and back-to-school traffic often add to the ozone problem, so there's still a risk of a violation in September. Hence the need for a second Air Alert.

This alert is expected to last at least through Thursday. For more information, visit valleyair.org.

Air Alert Returns To Valley

Alert Includes Counties Of San Joaquin, Stanislaus

KCRA.com, Monday, Sept. 5, 2011

SACRAMENTO, Calif. -- A new Air Alert is in effect for the San Joaquin Valley starting Monday, according to the San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District.

The latest Air Alert, which comes on the heels of the Valley's first Air Alert that ended earlier this week, will be in effect until Thursday.

A new Air Alert includes the counties of San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and portions of Kern.

The first Air Alert was a success and resulted in one of the cleanest Augusts on record, according to air officials.

Air Alerts are put into effect when conditions may lead to ozone (smog) formation that results in exceeding health-based standards. This can trigger financial penalties from the federal government.

Currently, an additional \$12 is added to the annual registration fee of every passenger car registered in the Valley. The money is a penalty for the area not being in compliance with federal pollution rules. In order to make that fee go away, air pollution in the valley must remain below the federal limits for three years.

People are urged to reduce their driving and instead carpool, use alternative forms of transportation, avoid drive-through windows and refrain from idling in their vehicles. They are also asked to cut back on use of gasoline-powered landscape equipment and barbecues until the alert had expired.

Air Alerts are only expected to be called in late summer and early fall.

Valley Air Alert Still in Effect

Submitted by Claudia Johnson

News10.net, Monday, Sept. 5, 2011

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District reminds an Air Alert to curb vehicle emissions which can lead to higher ozone levels is in effect for the first week of September.

The district issued an Air Alert for Aug. 23 through Aug. 29 and thanks to the cooperation of residents and businesses, no community in the district exceeded federal, health-based ozone standards. Doing so can lead to large fines.

Drivers are asked to continue to refrain from unnecessary vehicle trips and vehicle idling and using drive-through services. Carpooling, vanpooling and using alternative methods of travel and transit are encouraged.

Businesses are asked to offer flexible schedules and telecommuting.

The Air Alert is in effect through Sept. 8.

Air Alert issued for eight Valley counties Sept. 5-8

Sun-Star staff

Merced Sun-Star and Modesto Bee, Saturday, Sept. 3, 2011

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution District said the Valley air basin is in an Air Alert from Monday, Sept. 5 to Thursday, Sept. 8, with the possibility of extension through Friday, Sept. 9. This includes the counties of Merced, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and portions of Kern.

The Air Alert follows the successful inaugural Air Alert that was declared during back-to-school week. Because of the work of Valley residents and businesses, it resulted in one of the cleanest Augusts on record, the district said in a news release.

Air Alerts are called when conditions may lead to ozone formation that results in exceeding the health-based one-hour ozone standard. There are steps residents and businesses can take to prevent this. Reducing vehicle use is an important way to reduce these emissions.

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.

The district will issue regular updates during this episode.

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.healthyliving.com.

Valley air historically clean in August; Air Alert issued for September

By Sabra Stafford

Turlock Journal, Friday, Sept. 2, 2011

One day after announcing for the first time the San Joaquin Valley has seen August pass without recording a single violation of federal air standards, the Air Pollution Control District issued an Air Alert for the first week of September.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said Thursday that this was the first time in recorded history that the air basin did not incur an exceedance for the standard in August. Air District officials were crediting the new Air Alert campaign with helping citizens recognize times of poor air quality and taking steps to curb smog-forming emissions, such as driving less.

"This is a historic accomplishment, for which the Valley's residents and businesses can take credit," said Seyed Sadredin, the Air District's executive director and air pollution control officer. "They used the information provided by Air Alerts to accomplish the objective of keeping ozone levels below this important threshold."

The Valley's first Air Alert notification began Aug. 23 and extended through Aug. 29. The most recent Air Alert episode was issued from Monday through Thursday, with the possibility of extension through Friday. This includes the counties of San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and portions of Kern.

Air Alert episodes are declared when conditions may lead to ozone formation that results in exceeding health-based ozone standards. Typically, exceedances of the one-hour ozone standard – which is set at 125 parts per billion – coincide with the start of the school year and increased vehicle traffic.

Ozone is formed when pollutants combine in heat and sunlight. Temperatures during the Air Alert episode were five degrees above normal, and with added pollution associated with back to school traffic, the ozone concentration rose again; however, this year, with the Valley's first Air Alert campaign, ozone levels for the first time in history stayed below the threshold in August.

"The air basin has gone from 18 exceedances in August 1996 to two last year, to none this year. It is truly a remarkable accomplishment," Sadredin said.

The highest level reached during the Air Alert was 116 ppb recorded in Edison in Kern County on Aug. 24, according to the Air District.

When the federal level is exceeded fines are levied against the region. In 2010, the San Joaquin Valley was fined \$29 million by the Environmental Protection Agency because it exceeded the federal air-quality standards twice in August. A portion of the fine will be paid by residents in the form of an extra \$12 on all Valley vehicle registration fees beginning in October.

The Air District is trying to get the fines from last year repealed.

"This penalty does not recognize the incredible improvements we have made across the board in our air quality," Sadredin said.

Eighty percent of the Valley's ozone problem is caused by vehicle use. When an Air Alert is declared, residents and businesses are urged to put into place measures that reduce vehicle miles traveled, including carpooling, vanpooling, using alternative transportation, avoiding the use of drive-through services and refraining from vehicle idling. All of these actions produce emissions that lead to ozone formation. Businesses are asked to offer flexible scheduling to reduce commute-time traffic and allow telecommuting. Additionally, residents and businesses are encouraged to shift ozone creating activities, such as lawn maintenance, to early mornings or after the Air Alert episode is over.

"We continue to be greatly encouraged by the tangible results of all of our efforts in the air basin for cleaner air," Sadredin said.

Business groups say new smog rule will hurt Obama in 2012

Renee Schoof, McClatchy Newspapers
In the Modesto Bee, Friday, Sept. 2, 2011

WASHINGTON — Within weeks, the Environmental Protection Agency is expected to tighten the national standard for ozone, the main ingredient in smog. In last-minute lobbying, business groups are warning that the country can't afford cleaner air in an economic downturn and that President Barack Obama can't afford it politically, either.

Ozone inflames the airways, makes it hard to breathe, worsens asthma and other lung ailments, and increases the risk of death from lung or heart disease.

The Bush administration in 2008 set the ozone standard at 75 parts per billion, even though EPA scientists and the EPA's independent science advisory panel said it should be set a 60 to 70 parts per billion. Facing a lawsuit from the attorneys general of 14 states, the Obama administration's EPA decided not to defend the Bush standard but instead decide whether it should be changed.

The Business Roundtable, comprising chief executive officers of top U.S. corporations, argued in a letter to the White House last week that the Bush-era standard should remain unchanged because any change under consideration "threatens to seriously impede economic expansion."

In areas where the standard isn't met, new businesses or those that expand would have to install emissions controls to avoid worsening ozone levels. The letter said that these costs, plus uncertainty and bureaucratic delays, could lead businesses to close some facilities and open new ones elsewhere, including outside the U.S.

The Roundtable said a new rule for ozone levels would cost businesses \$20 billion to \$90 billion annually, depending on how tough the EPA makes it.

Ozone is mainly a problem in summer because sunlight and heat help it form from emissions from fossil-fuel burning, oil and gas drilling and chemical solvents. Because there are many sources and because ozone can travel hundreds of miles, cities and rural areas alike can have high levels.

American Petroleum Institute president and chief executive officer Jack Gerard said the ozone standard is "all about jobs, and I believe it is the most significant regulation right now that will stand in the way of job creation."

Obama could overrule EPA's plans and stick to the Bush standard.

It's the "first true test" of the president's interest in creating jobs, Gerard said at a press conference. He said the country couldn't afford tighter ozone rules.

"That would be a high burden on an economy that's already pretty fragile," agreed John Engler, president of the Business Roundtable.

The country is headed into a presidential election that will focus mainly on jobs, and the ozone rule would be a job killer, said Engler, a Republican and former Michigan governor. "We think this really represents a test of, is the president serious or not."

A White House official, who didn't want to be identified because the standard hasn't been announced yet, said: "There's been a lot of speculation out there. The truth is that this administration will continue to put in place smart standards that are based on science and the law, and at the same time the president has been clear that when it comes to implementing a standard, we will do so in a way that maximizes flexibility to ensure it does not impede our economic recovery in any way.

"He believes that it is essential that considerations of cost and impacts on local communities and businesses are a fundamental part of proposals to meet the standard," the official said.

EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson last week wrote that ozone is "among the most widespread and stubborn air pollutants" and is "responsible for tens of thousands of visits to emergency rooms by Americans each year for serious bronchial conditions, including asthma."

Children are at a higher risk because their lungs are still developing and they spend more time playing outside. Senior citizens also are especially vulnerable. Healthy younger adults also can be harmed by ozone if they exercise outside on bad air days.

Jackson, in a public letter to Sen. Thomas Carper, D-Del., wrote that flexibility brought compliance costs down to "a fraction" of the tens of billions a year that business groups warned about when the Clinton administration tightened the standard in 1997.

Some improvements in ozone will come from pollution reduction required in another rule the EPA recently made final. It will reduce power plant emissions that spread ozone and fine particle pollution to other states.

Valley Air Alert begins Monday

Visalia Times Delta Friday, Sept. 2, 2011

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has issued an Air Alert from Monday to Thursday with the possibility of it lasting through Friday.

It includes the counties of Tulare, Kings, Fresno, Kern, Madera, Merced and San Joaquin. The alerts are called when conditions may lead to ozone formation, which could result in exceeding the health-based 1-hour ozone standard.

Exceeding the standard could lead to millions of dollars in fines.

Residents and businesses are encouraged to take steps to prevent this. Residents can reduce smog-forming emissions by:

- Refraining from idling when dropping off/picking up students
- Carpooling, vanpooling or using alternate transportation.
- Refraining from using drive-through serviced

Businesses can reduce emissions by:

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

Updates will be issued by the district during the Air Alert.

For more information visit www.valleyair.org.