

Drive as little as possible, San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials advise

By Ross Farrow

Lodi News Sentinel, Sunday, Sept. 30, 2012

With temperatures expected to be well in the 90s this week, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District advises residents to reduce their driving.

The pollution district advises you to take the following steps through Wednesday:

Carpool or vanpool.

Ride your bicycle, walk or use mass transit.

Eliminate vehicle idling and reduce the number of vehicle trips.

Employers making employee telecommuting available.

The smog alert includes San Joaquin County to Kern County. For more information, visit www.valleyair.org or www.healthvairliving.com.

Fresno to hit 103 degrees on first day of October

By Jacob Rayburn, staff writer

The Fresno Bee, Sunday, Sept. 30, 2012

The calendar says October, but today will feel more like July.

Fresno's daytime high today is expected to reach 103 -- which would set a record for the date. Tuesday's forecast high is not much better: 102.

But by Wednesday, Valley temperatures should begin to ease, gradually retreating into the upper 80s by Saturday, said National Weather Service meteorologist Carlos Molina.

Molina said the area has suffered from an unlucky string of high pressure systems that block the cooler air that normally slips into the Valley.

On Sunday, Fresno's high reached 97, short of the record of 101 set in 2010.

Sunday's high capped a September that saw 29 days of 90-plus-degree temperatures. That brings the month's average high in Fresno to 96.9 degrees, short of the record 97.4 average set in 1888.

The heat has prompted an air alert for the Valley through Wednesday because of stagnant air and expected smog buildup, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said Friday.

Air alert declared for parts of Valley

Central Valley Business Times, Saturday, Sept. 29, 2012

Unusual late-season high temperatures and stagnant atmospheric conditions, combined with vehicle emissions, have prompted the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to declare the second "Air Alert" of the year, Saturday through Wednesday.

The alerts are declared Valley-wide when conditions are favorable for ozone levels to exceed the federal one-hour ozone standard unless action is taken to prevent them from increasing.

"We're facing abnormal conditions this week and it's critical to minimize our emissions," says Seyed Sadredin, the district's executive director and air pollution control officer.

During an air alert, residents and businesses are urged to put into place measures that reduce vehicle emissions.

San Joaquin Valley air better but still pretty bad

Bee staff reports

Modesto Bee, Saturday, Sept. 29, 2012

The valley's summertime air is dangerous at times — 91 ozone violations and counting this year. And residents are paying a \$29 million annual fine for failing to clean it up faster.

The best reasons to clean up the valley's air: The corrosive gas triggers asthma and other lung illnesses. Sometimes, it kills people before their time.

So, are you any better off than you were 10 years ago? Yes, say government watchdog agencies. Not really, say environmentalists, health advocates and community activist groups.

More than 40 percent of a key ozone-making gas, NO_x, is gone. Also gone are terrible years such as 2002, when thousands of valley residents were affected by the terrible air.

Now, as this ozone season winds down, the air here still is not healthy.

Friday, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued an unusual late-season alert for today through Wednesday, when temperatures are expected to climb into the low to mid-90s. To reduce emissions, people are advised to reduce driving or idling in their cars and use gas-powered lawn mowers early in the morning.

Fresno and Bakersfield continue to appear in the American Lung Association national rankings among the five cities most polluted by ozone. Merced is No. 10 on that list.

Unfortunately, the 25,000-square-mile San Joaquin Valley is a friend to ozone, more so than almost anywhere in the country.

The recipe for creating ozone reads like a valley profile: You need heat, sunlight, stagnant air, NO_x (oxides of nitrogen) from cars and trucks, and pollutants coming from dairies, gasoline and other sources. And because the valley is a gigantic bowl, it often traps ozone for days.

The air quality in Modesto and Merced isn't as bad as in Fresno and other areas farther south because conditions get worse deeper into the valley, said Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the air district.

This year, Sadredin said, there were 33 violations of the eight-hour ozone standards in Stanislaus County, compared with 40 recorded a decade earlier. And the number of unhealthy air days in the county during the same period as defined by the Environmental Protection Agency dropped from five in 2002 to two in 2012, he said.

Despite the improvements, Sadredin said, people and businesses must do everything they can to comply with air quality rules not only for their good, but the good of their neighbors to the south.

The valley has a long way to go, said Kerry Drake, associate director of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's air division in San Francisco.

Still, he sees hope for meeting the cleanup deadline of late 2023 for the eight-hour ozone standard — an average of ozone readings over eight-hour periods.

"I know it seems hard to believe that we could make it," he said. "But technology, pollution reduction and public awareness have come so far in the last 10 years. It is definitely better now in the valley."

The air district has passed many of the toughest rules in the nation, among them the pioneering control of pollution coming from agriculture, Sadredin said.

"Despite significant reductions in emissions and even with the toughest air regulations, our challenges are tougher than any other region in the nation," he said.

Activists agree about the challenge, but they say the groundbreaking rules for agriculture and other pollution sources were forced by environmental lawsuits.

Even so, the district wrote rules that are not so tough, said Kevin Hall, executive director of the Central Valley Air Quality Coalition, representing dozens of groups.

For instance, activists five years ago suggested banning the use of old, polluting trucks, cars, boats and commercial equipment on the smoggiest summer days. The district rejected the idea, saying it would be too harsh on business.

"There are too many times when the district board says we can't get something done," Hall said. "We need leadership that says it can be done."

There is also friction between the district and the federal government over the \$29 million annual ozone fine, most of which is paid by registered vehicle owners.

The fine was triggered when the valley missed the 2010 cleanup deadline for the federal one-hour ozone standard.

Although the standard was abolished seven years ago, federal law still requires attainment. Sadredin said more than 90 percent of one-hour violations have been eliminated.

"We think it's unreasonable to make the valley pay \$29 million for a few hours of readings over the standard," Sadredin said.

Roasted pumpkin pies: 100 degrees in October?

By Alex Breitler

Stockton Record, Saturday, Sept. 29, 2012

October - a month best known for crisp evenings, the harvest moon and pumpkins on the vine - may be welcomed Monday with one last shot of triple-digit temperatures in Stockton.

It would be the fourth year on record in which the city experienced 100-degree heat in October.

The likelihood remains unclear. The National Weather Service on Friday posted a predicted high of 100 degrees for Stockton on Monday, but a forecaster later in the day said he was leaning toward 99 degrees.

Air Alert

Unusual heat expected this weekend and early next week prompted air quality officials on Friday to call an "Air Alert" in the San Joaquin Valley.

The combination of hot temperatures and vehicle emissions creates ozone pollution in the Valley. Drivers and businesses from Stockton to Bakersfield are paying a \$29 million annual penalty for failing to meet an ozone standard.

During the Air Alert, which continues through Wednesday, drivers are asked to avoid idling their vehicles, to consider carpooling to work or school and to avoid using drive-through services. The goal is to avoid further violations of the standard and eventually eliminate the penalty.

"We're going to be real close on that one," said forecaster Karl Swanberg.

Either way, it will be unseasonably hot. Stockton will finish September with 21 days at or above 90 degrees, the most since September 1984.

Historically, 100-degree temperatures have occurred as early as April 30 and as late as Oct. 4.

Since the city's official weather station was established at the airport in 1948, temperatures topping 100 degrees in October have occurred only in 1952, 1980 and 2001. At Fire Station No. 4, 5525 Pacific Ave., the phenomenon was noted more frequently - in 1980, 1991, 1996 and 2001.

Extreme heat is rare in October simply because the sun sets earlier and does not rise as high in the sky, meaning less time for temperatures to build over the course of the day, Swanberg said.

Regardless of how hot it gets Monday, he said a significant cool-down is expected by the end of next week, when high temperatures could dive down into the mid-80s.

High temperatures, emissions prompt five-day air alert

The Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, Sept. 29, 2012

Local air officials have declared the second Air Alert of the season -- for Saturday through Wednesday -- because of high temperatures and stagnant atmospheric conditions combined with vehicle emissions.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issues such alerts when ozone levels may exceed the federal one-hour ozone standard unless action is taken to prevent them from increasing, according to an air district news release.

Thus, the public is urged to refrain from vehicle idling; try to carpool or vanpool; and avoid using drive-throughs.

"Thanks to the public's understanding of this issue and their efforts to reduce emissions, we've had a good summer so far, and we're on track for the first August and September ever with no one-hour ozone exceedances," Seyed Sadredin, the air district's executive director and air pollution control officer, said in a statement. "But we're facing abnormal conditions this week and it's critical to minimize our emissions."

Bakersfield temperatures in the next week are forecast to be about 20 degrees above normal for this time of year, said National Weather Service meteorologist Carlos Molina.

"It's (almost) October and we're still seeing 100 degree temperatures in the Bakersfield area," Molina said.

Temperatures throughout the weekend are expected to be in the upper 90s, and by Monday could top 100. Not until next Friday will temperatures likely dip to the lower 90s.

Those temperatures come from high pressure over the western United States, and that brings stagnant air, which is prone to become more polluted, Molina said.

"High ozone levels are dangerous to public health and also those one-hour exceedances can lead to a penalty such as we are paying now in the valley," said Janelle Schneider, a spokeswoman for the air district.

Ozone results from a combination of emissions, hot weather and static atmospheric conditions, Schneider said.

According to the air district's news release, "So far this year, the air basin has had a single 1-hour ozone exceedance earlier in the summer. Federal law requires no more than three exceedances at any given monitor throughout the valley within a three-year period in order to avoid an annual \$29 million penalty."

High ozone can be bad for your health, too, making respiratory conditions including asthma worse, and lead to sore throats and coughs.

The air district offers a free Real-Time Air Advisory Network that sends air-quality data to users' computers or phones. Go to valleyair.org/Programs/RAAN/raan_landing.htm. For more information about Air Alerts, go to valleyair.org and healthyairliving.com.

Valleywide Air Alert called through Wednesday

Hanford Sentinel, late Friday, Sept. 28, 2012

Unusual late-season high temperatures and stagnant atmospheric conditions, combined with vehicle emissions, have prompted local air officials to declare the second Air Alert of the year, today through Wednesday.

Air alerts are declared Valley-wide when conditions are favorable for ozone levels to exceed the federal one-hour ozone standard unless action is taken to prevent them from increasing.

"Thanks to the public's understanding of this issue and their efforts to reduce emissions, we've had a good summer so far, and we're on track for the first August and September ever with no one-hour ozone exceedances," said Seyed Sadredin, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's executive director and air pollution control officer. "But we're facing abnormal conditions this week and it's critical to minimize our emissions."

So far this year, the air basin has had a single one-hour ozone exceedance earlier in the summer. Federal law requires no more than three exceedances at any given monitor throughout the Valley within a three-year period in order to avoid an annual \$29 million penalty.

"If we avoid any exceedances through October, we are on track for Year One of this three-year period," Sadredin said.

During an Air Alert episode, residents and businesses are urged to put into place measures that reduce vehicle emissions, such as refraining from vehicle idling, carpooling or vanpooling, and avoiding the use of drive-through services.

Additional measures, such as shifting ozone-creating activities such as lawn maintenance to early mornings, can help offset rising ozone levels.

Officials urge residents to take health-protective measures during periods when ozone is building. High ozone levels can exacerbate respiratory conditions such as asthma, and cause symptoms such as sore throat and coughing.

September heat hits Fresno record Temperatures forecast to reach 100s again.

By Eddie Jimenez, staff writer

The Fresno Bee, Friday, Sept. 28, 2012

September has done little to bring the Valley relief from this summer's extreme heat -- and record-high temperatures are expected the first few days of October.

Friday's high of 96 marked the 27th day of 90-plus-degree temperatures for Fresno in September, tying the most ever for the month, according to the National Weather Service in Hanford.

That record, set in 1991, is likely to be broken with forecast highs of 96 today and 100 on Sunday -- the latter just one degree shy of a record.

And the start of October -- with The Big Fresno Fair opening on Wednesday -- will be even hotter.

The expected highs of 103 on Monday and Tuesday would break records for the dates. Wednesday's predicted high of 101 would tie a record.

Thursday should dip to the mid-90s before the high is expected to drop to 89 on Friday.

The heat has prompted an air alert for the Valley today through Wednesday because of stagnant air and expected smog buildup from unusually high temperatures this time of the year, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said Friday.

All this after a record-setting August in which Fresno's monthly average high temperature was 102.2 degrees -- more than a half-degree above the previous record of 101.5 set in 1891.

So what's up -- besides the temperatures?

High-pressure systems, which eventually pass through, have been stubborn this summer, hanging over much of the country and causing the persistent heat during the past few months, said Jim Andersen, a National Weather Service meteorologist.

"We've got this stagnant pattern across most of the United States."

The average high temperature in Fresno for this month through Friday is 96.8, well above the average high for September of 90.2 dating to 1887, Andersen said.

The record average high for September is 97.4 set in 1888.

Even if this September's average high doesn't exceed the 124-year-old record, a good chance exists that it will be the second-highest average ever for the month, which is 96.1 in 1984.

This month, 20 days have reached 95 or above, including six of 100 or above.

Officials with The Big Fresno Fair are ready to make attendees as comfortable as possible, providing misters, swamp coolers in exhibit buildings and plenty of shade, said Stacy Rianda, fair deputy manager.

Noting that fair organizers are accustomed to extreme weather conditions from heat to rain, Rianda said, "Nothing is a surprise, so we try to be as prepared as possible."

The fair runs Oct. 3-14.

The air alert is the second this year. An alert is called when an area is in danger of exceeding a federal standard for ozone, air officials said.

Carpooling and alternate transportation are encouraged.

Drivers also are asked to refrain from idling their vehicles and using drive-through services.

The air alert is in effect for the counties of Fresno, Kings, Tulare, Madera, Merced, Stanislaus and San Joaquin and the Valley air basin portion of Kern County.

Unusual conditions prompt new Air Alert

The Turlock Journal, Friday, Sept. 28, 2012

Unusual late-season high temperatures and stagnant atmospheric conditions, combined with vehicle emissions, have prompted local air officials to declare the second Air Alert of the year, Saturday through Wednesday.

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During an Air Alert episode, residents and businesses are urged to put into place measures that reduce vehicle emissions, such as:

- Refraining from vehicle idling,
- Carpooling or vanpooling, and

- Avoiding the use of drive-through services.

Additional measures, such as shifting ozone-creating activities such as lawn maintenance to early mornings, can help offset rising ozone levels.

Officials urge residents to take health-protective measures during periods when ozone is building. High ozone levels can exacerbate respiratory conditions such as asthma, and cause symptoms such as sore throat and coughing.

The Air District encourages residents to subscribe to the Real-Time Air Advisory Network, a free data-delivery service which sends current, real-time air-quality data directly to the subscriber's computer or phone. Additionally, the RAAN program offers outdoor activity guidelines for rising ozone levels. To learn more about RAAN, visit http://www.valleyair.org/Programs/RAAN/raan_landing.htm.

"Our experience this year with regard to this 1-hour ozone standard demonstrates the success of the Healthy Air Living program, which urges people to adopt air-friendly practices, and the Valley's active participation in minimizing air pollution," Sadredin said.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Sat., Sept. 29, 2012:](#)

Bad air hurts parks

While recent news and opinions present myriad positions about who's to blame and what needs to be done to fix the Valley's dirty air, the fact remains that we suffer from some of the worst air pollution in the world, according to the World Health Organization. Dirty air is dangerous for our health and quality of life in the Valley and iconic national wonders such as Yosemite, Sequoia, and Kings Canyon national parks.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, through the approval of its governing board, is responsible for cleaning up stationary sources of air pollution. The organization is our first line of defense, and we need to ensure that they are doing their job. In order to do so, we need to participate in the public process.

The Air District's Monitoring Network Plan is available, with comments due on Oct. 18, and its public workshop on a Particulate Matter 2.5 Plan (arguably the Valley's most dangerous pollutant) is rescheduled for Oct. 9.

We must help shape the policies that are crucially important to our health and that of our national parks, which host millions of visitors from all over the world and help drive our economy.

*Emily Schrepf, Central Valley program manager
National Parks Conservation Association
Fresno*