

Air Alert in effect for back-to-school week

Staff reports, Merced Sun-Star

In the Fresno Bee, Sacramento Bee and other papers, Monday, Aug. 19, 2013

Authorities have called an Air Alert from Monday through Wednesday, saying valley residents need to be aware of rising ozone levels with school beginning and traffic expected to increase as a result.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District announced the alert on Friday. It's hoped that motorists will avoid idling their cars and using drive-through services when an alert is declared. Residents are also encouraged to car-pool.

School is scheduled to begin Monday and Tuesday in most of Merced County's school districts. More vehicles are expected on the roadways as parents with children and older students head back to school.

In addition to reducing their driving during Air Alerts, residents are asked to shift ozone-creating activities — such as mowing and edging lawns with gasoline-powered equipment — to early mornings.

Ozone forms best in hot, sunny, stagnant conditions. Air quality was better early in August after the July heat wave broke and temperatures dropped into the 90s for several days. But the possibility of 100-degree days and ozone problems have returned.

"In the past couple of years, we have had an extraordinary level of cooperation by the public," said Seyed Sadredin, district executive director.

Ozone is a corrosive gas that damages the lungs, eyes and skin. Health experts say ozone can trigger lung and heart ailments and cause early mortality.

The cooperation could help the valley achieve the one-hour federal ozone standard that has proved elusive for many years. Through vehicle registration fees, motorists are paying most of a \$29 million annual penalty for missing the cleanup deadline on the standard.

The one-hour federal ozone standard was abolished in 2005, but air districts still must achieve the defunct threshold or face penalties. The valley's air regularly exceeds the more stringent eight-hour federal ozone standard, which has cleanup deadlines in the next decade.

San Joaquin Valley officials issue air alert

By Associated Press

In the Fresno Bee, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Friday, Aug. 16, 2013

FRESNO, Calif. — San Joaquin Valley air pollution officials are warning residents to cut driving and car idling as they scramble to avoid violating the federal government's ozone standard next week.

The regional air district is declaring the season's first air alert beginning Monday through Wednesday.

A combination of hot weather and increased back-to-school traffic are combining to trap ozone gas in the trough-shaped valley.

In 2010, the region became the first in the U.S. to be fined for failing to meet the federal deadline for reducing ozone pollution.

The valley must record three clean years in a row for the \$29 million annual fine to end.

It is being paid by an assessment on businesses and through a \$12 annual vehicle registration fee for drivers from Stockton to Bakersfield.

San Joaquin Valley officials issue air alert

Staff & Wire Report

Bakersfield Californian, Monday, Aug. 19, 2013

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Heather Heinks, an air district spokeswoman in Fresno, said valley residents have responded in a big way to previous requests by the district to reduce car idling, especially by parents picking up students from school.

"There are 1,600 schools in the San Joaquin Valley," Heinks said. "Imagine it's 3 in the afternoon, temperatures near 100 degrees, and 20 to 50 cars are idling at each school."

If a significant percentage of those motorists shut off their engines while they waited, it could make the difference, she said, between remaining within the federal standard and spiking ozone levels.

In 2010, the region became the first in the United States to be fined for failing to meet the federal deadline for reducing ozone pollution.

The valley must record three clean years in a row for the \$29 million annual fine to end. In 2011 there were three exceedances of the federal 1-hour ozone standard. Last year there were two, but the air district is calling them exceptional events and may ask to have them declared invalid.

There have been no such exceedances so far this year.

The fine is being paid by an assessment on businesses and through a \$12 annual vehicle registration fee for drivers from Stockton to Bakersfield.

At school, fall is in the (cough) air

Regulators want to educate districts about idling cars

By [Alex Breitler](#)

Stockton Record, Monday, Aug. 19, 2013

In the San Joaquin Valley, "back to school" means books, alarm clocks and air pollution.

Officials say there's a definite connection between the start of the school year and levels of pollution.

In particular, they say, drivers who idle their vehicles while waiting to pick up children after school are partly to blame for the Valley's failure to meet an ozone-pollution standard.

Air alert

Air quality officials have called an "Air Alert" in the San Joaquin Valley for today through Wednesday.

They're asking residents to consider carpooling, bicycling and walking instead of driving, and to avoid idling their vehicles.

More information: valleyair.org.

And that failure is costing us. If you drive a car in the Valley, you're paying a portion of an annual \$29 million penalty.

The good news is the Valley may finally be close to shedding that burden, if pollution levels stay down for the rest of August and into September and October. Even so, air regulators want to start a longer-term conversation with school officials on ways to decrease all of that driving and idling.

"It's a huge issue," said Jaime Holt, spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "This fall we're going to start trying to get meetings with superintendents, (school) districts and boards to begin talking to them about this issue and their feelings about it."

Among the strategies air quality officials have discussed:

- Asking schools to delay the start of the school year until ozone levels begin to decline, or to stagger release times at the end of the day so that not everyone is driving at once;
- Putting up "no-idling" signs in front of schools;
- Providing financial incentives for schools to build shade structures to encourage drivers to leave their cars while waiting for students;
- A public information campaign with media messages and pamphlets.

An air district staff report from June also discusses the possibility of requiring schools to adopt one or more of those measures, but Holt said this week that regulations are not yet on the table.

"We're not there at all," she said. She said meetings will be held with schools over the next year.

Stockton Unified spokeswoman Dianne Barth said Friday that the district already has staggered release times, to facilitate bus transportation. And some students walk to neighborhood schools.

"What we don't have are extra funds" for new programs, she said.

Holt said the issue comes down to education. The district says that idling a car for four minutes produces the same amount of pollution as driving one mile, and that idling a car for longer than 10 seconds burns more gas than cutting the engine and restarting.

The district also says 43 percent of Valley children who are driven to school in private vehicles live within one mile of that school. That suggests there is potential to encourage more walking, said Holt.

She acknowledged safety concerns - "It's a different world" than it used to be, she said - but perhaps parents could organize and lead walking groups.

Not to be forgotten are the health impacts of pollution, which can be especially severe for children. They breathe more air for their body weight than adults, and their short stature places them closer to vehicle tailpipes.

For the moment, however, all eyes are on whether the Valley can finally beat that \$29 million penalty, which is the result of a federal standard that has actually been revoked but for which penalties can still be applied.

To meet the standard, air quality stations from Stockton to Bakersfield can exceed it no more than three times over a period of three years.

One station in southwest Fresno topped the standard three times in 2011 and once again in 2012, but air quality officials say that most recent violation was caused by a wildfire and shouldn't count as a violation.

If the Environmental Protection Agency agrees, and ozone levels stay low the rest of this summer, the standard would finally be met, Holt said. The district board could then choose to remove the penalty, which Valley drivers pay in the form of an annual \$12 DMV surcharge.

Officials have called an "Air Alert" starting today, and urged the public to drive less.

"We just want people to understand we are really close (to meeting the standard), and really need them to change their behavior," Holt said.

Back-to-school traffic triggers smog alert High ozone levels anticipated with increased vehicle use

Taft Midway Driller, Sat., Aug. 17, 2013

The Valley air basin will be in an Air Alert episode from Monday Aug. 19th to Wednesday Aug. 21. This includes the counties of San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and portions of Kern.

Air Alert episodes are called when conditions may lead to ozone formation that results in exceeding health-based ozone standards and federal penalties assessed on the area. There are steps residents and businesses can take to prevent this. Reducing vehicle use is an important way to reduce these emissions.

The annual notification program addresses ozone (smog) levels that correlate to increased vehicle use, including back-to-school traffic.

Air alert

About 80 percent of the Valley's ozone is caused by vehicle use, and during back-to-school week, vehicle idling is also a major air-quality concern.

"In the past couple of years, we have had an extraordinary level of cooperation by the public in keeping these ozone levels down, and we are again asking for their participation," said Seyed Sadredin, the Air District's executive director and air pollution control officer.

Exceedances not only threaten the health of Valley residents but also contribute to the possibility of the continuation of an annual \$29 million federal penalty.

Air Alerts are declared Valley-wide when conditions such as increased emissions, high temperatures and stagnant air flow are favorable for ozone levels to exceed federal, health-based standards. During an Air Alert episode, which may last several days, residents and businesses are urged to reduce vehicle miles traveled, including refraining from vehicle idling, carpooling or vanpooling and avoiding the use of drive-through services. Other measures, such as shifting ozone-creating activities including lawn maintenance to early mornings, can also help offset rising ozone levels.

To receive notification of an Air Alert, call the District's 1-800 SMOG INFO (766-4463) number; visit www.valleyair.org; or subscribe to a free, automated email list (<http://valleyair.org/list.list.htm>).

For more information about Air Alerts, visit www.valleyair.org, www.healthyairliving.com or call a District office: in Fresno (559-230-6000) in Modesto (209-557-6400) or in Bakersfield (661-392-5500).

Valley air officials aim to cool down decades-old smog problem

By Mark Grossi, staff writer

Fresno Bee and Modesto Bee, Sat., Aug. 17, 2013

In sweltering September 2011, Fresno could have used more trees. Temperatures climbed, winds died and lung-searing ozone spiked the season's highest readings on three days.

Worse yet, all three peaks broke the one-hour federal ozone standard between 3 p.m. and 4 p.m. on weekdays when children were outside after school.

An extensive canopy of trees over streets, parking lots and driveways might have kept ozone-cooking heat down just enough to avert those dangerous peaks, say researchers. Plus, trees actually take pollutants out of the air.

It's time to talk seriously about using trees and other city-cooling ideas, such as reflective or cool roofs, to end the San Joaquin Valley's decades-long quest to achieve the federal one-hour ozone standard, say air-quality leaders.

These days, only a few parts per billion of ozone on a few days a year separate the Valley from the achievement.

"Ten years ago, it might not have made as much sense to everyone to pursue these strategies," said Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "But we've passed many rules, made many advances, and we're so close to compliance on the one-hour standard now."

The one-hour threshold is 125 parts per billion, which the Valley had no prayer of achieving in the past. This 25,000-square-mile bowl allows dirty air to build up for days -- it's an incubator for one of the worst ozone problems in the nation.

With cleaner-running vehicles and ever-tightening regulations on everything from dairies to urban sprawl, ozone peaks have dropped from the 150s to the 130s over the last decade.

University of California at Davis research suggests that if Fresno aggressively pushed city cooling efforts, temperatures could drop as much as 4 degrees. Up to 7 parts per billion could be trimmed off ozone peaks.

The stakes are high in this fight. When the standard is achieved, it will eliminate a \$29 million annual penalty, most of which is paid by Valley motorists in their vehicle registration fees.

But money isn't the best reason to fight ozone, health researchers say. Ozone is a corrosive gas that damages lungs, eyes and skin. It is linked to heart and lung ailments as well as early mortality.

The Valley's climate creates ideal conditions for ozone, which forms best in heat, sunlight and stagnant air. Scientists say turning down the heat just a little is a logical approach to shave off the peaks on bad days.

It's a fight against the phenomenon called the urban heat island. Cities become heat islands as they trap energy from the sun in asphalt, rooftops and buildings, particularly in places as sunny and warm as Fresno or other Valley cities.

Drive from downtown Fresno into the surrounding farmland on most any summer day. Feel the temperature drop several degrees. Streets and parking lots of this 112-square-mile city hold the heat long after dark.

"Think of it as a heat dome over the city," said meteorologist Paul Iniguez of the National Weather Service in Hanford. "It's not a perfect dome, because there are green spaces in cities, such as parks. But it has the characteristics of a dome."

As the climate warms over the next century, scientists expect heat islands to become more intense and more of a factor in ozone problems. The cost of cooling homes and businesses will no doubt rise, scientists say.

Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory has a heat island research team that has worked on several cooling approaches, including vegetation, reflective materials for roofs and pavement.

In roofing, for instance, materials might include titanium dioxide to reflect infrared light. Though human eyes don't perceive such light, it contains about half the energy in the sunlight that hits Earth.

Experiments have shown dramatic differences with the reflective material. In a side-by-side comparison of a reflective parking lot and a more standard blacktop parking lot, scientists recorded a 30-degree difference on a June day in Berkeley.

"The darker materials absorb more heat," said Benjamin Mandel, graduate research assistant at Berkeley Lab.

In Fresno, Berkeley researchers studied the difference between a light-colored concrete-tile roof and a dark asphalt-shingle roof during the five hottest months last year. The light-colored, more reflective roof saved a total of \$350 over the five months.

Mandel said that if all Fresno homes had the reflective roof, the savings would be about \$60 million each year.

But such a radical change in a city of half a million might be a lot to expect, he said. A more realistic scenario would be modest improvements over a smaller percentage of the city amounting to a few million dollars of savings -- still a worthy investment, he said.

California is pushing toward more energy- and water-efficient construction, but the new state building code, called CALGreen, has only voluntary measures for cool or reflective roofs for new homes or roof replacements on older homes.

The California Energy Code requires such roofs for new commercial buildings.

The city of Fresno does not mandate cool roofs, but officials are reviewing the development code, which includes a provision about trees in the landscaping of buildings and homes.

Since 1993, Fresno has required a tree for every two parking spaces in lots around the city, said Arnoldo Rodriguez, interim city planning manager.

"We're looking to reduce the number of parking spaces and the size of parking lots in the future," he said. "We're also exploring the idea of reducing the width of new streets with hopes of getting less paved area in the city."

Fresno needs to turn greener with trees, says Lee Ayers, executive director of Tree Fresno. His organization is pushing to make trees a priority in the city.

"I don't think there's any doubt that we all would benefit from more trees," he said. "It's not just a matter of planting new trees. We need to replace trees that have died and retain mature trees in this city."

Research links

- **Heat islands:** Read more about heat island research [by the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory](#).
- **Local issues:** Read the [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's report](#) on heat islands.
- **Tree guide:** Read "[Tree Guidelines for San Joaquin Valley Communities](#)."

Valley weighs in on smog, environment

Air district: Awareness still growing on smog, pollution

By Valerie Gibbons, staff writer

Visalia Times-Delta, Sunday, Aug. 18, 2013

Central Valley residents aren't as concerned about pollution and greenhouse gases as people in other parts of the state, according to a recent study — but they do agree that climate change will increase the threat of natural disaster.

The Public Policy Institute of California interviewed residents throughout the state on their views about global warming, smog, energy, congestion, offshore oil drilling and the government's handling of the environment.

Findings are based on a survey of 2,103 adult residents reached by landline and cell phone throughout the state. Interviews took place from July 9–23 and were conducted in English, Spanish, Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese), Korean and Vietnamese.

And while the Valley's conservative political leanings will come as no surprise, the survey highlighted a stark divide when it comes to the threats posed by climate change, congestion, buying hybrid cars and even smog.

One key finding: less than a third (31 percent) of all residents surveyed considered air pollution to be a big problem — about half as many as the statewide average. Valley residents were also slightly less concerned about smog as residents of Los Angeles and the Inland Empire despite a local regional push to fight emissions.

But Jamie Holt, spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said public awareness is building when it comes to air quality — and she added that local residents are starting to change their habits.

“It usually ranks as one of the top quality-of-life issues for people in the Valley,” she said. “We still see an enormous public outcry when it comes to air pollution.”

Holt said smog was usually one of the top three concerns the districts find in surveys, generally just behind jobs and poverty.

District campaigns like “Spare the Air” days and limits on wood burning in fireplaces during the winter have been in place since the late 1990s. Holt added that media coverage about the health effects of air pollution and removing agricultural exemptions for ag burning and equipment emissions also helped to increase awareness.

“It really put a magnifying glass on the problem,” she said.

And other programs to combat smog like ride-sharing or alternative transportation have also been slow to come to the Valley. Local residents are far more likely to commute to work alone (86 percent), nearly a third more than residents of the Bay Area. Only 3 percent of Valley commuters said they are seriously thinking about buying a hybrid vehicle.

Other findings include:

- Central Valley residents were the least likely to back calls for California to write its own rules when it comes to limits on greenhouse gases, with only 53 percent backing the concept, as opposed to 65 percent of Los Angeles-area residents.
- They're also more interested in drilling for oil off California's coast than the rest of the state: 51 percent of area residents favor offshore oil drilling, 10 percent higher than the state average.
- And while local residents are in favor of relying more on wind, solar and other green energy, they're not willing to pay more on their electric bill to make it happen. Just over a third of Valley residents (32 percent) said they would be willing to pay more for renewable technology.

One area of agreement: Central Valley residents concur with the rest of the state that climate change exacerbates the threat of natural disaster. Fifty-five percent of Valley residents surveyed said wildfires will become more severe, 53 percent agreed droughts will worsen and 27 percent said flooding will be on the rise because of climate change, very close to the state average.

Throughout the state, voters are critical of the way lawmakers have worked on environmental issues.

Asked how they rate elected leaders, 48 percent of California adults approve of the overall job performance of Gov. Jerry Brown. A record-high 54 percent of likely voters approve. His rating for handling environmental issues is lower: 39 percent of adults and 44 percent of likely voters approve. The state legislature's overall approval rating is 36 percent among adults and 33 percent among likely voters.

On environmental issues, the legislature has an approval rating of 38 percent among adults and 34 percent among likely voters.

This survey is the 13th the organization has developed on the environment since 2000.