

Cloudy skies and hot temperatures expected in Merced

Merced Sun-Star staff reports

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An overcast sky blanketed Merced on Monday, and according to weather officials, the clouds are expected to stick around until Wednesday morning.

Jim Andersen, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Hanford, said clouds and light sprinkles are due to monsoonal moisture flowing from areas with subtropical climate such as Mexico and Arizona.

Clouds keep the temperature lower during the daytime, so the higher temperatures are recorded in later hours when the clouds start parting, Andersen said. On Monday, the high of 97 was reached in late afternoon. Andersen explained that this weather is typical for the end of July and beginning of August.

Despite the misleading appearance of gloomy skies, temperatures continue to rise. According to forecasts, Tuesday's high is expected to reach 102 with a low of 65. Wednesday will be mainly sunny with a high of 100.

Temperatures in the high 90s are anticipated for the remainder of the week.

Air quality, which is typically affected by high temperatures, has remained at moderately good levels, according to the Valley Air District's Real-Time Air Advisory Network. On Monday, concentrations of fine particulate matter and ozone were recorded at Level 1 (Good) and Level 2 (Moderate), respectively. Andersen said there should be enough of a breeze this week to keep air quality at reasonably healthy levels.

According to Valley Air District officials, RAAN recorded a slight rise in particulate matter on the Fourth of July due to smoke from fireworks. By 10 p.m., particulate matter concentrations had reached Level 3 (Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups).

Anthony Presto, a Valley Air District spokesman, said Merced got a break in comparison with other areas. Turlock was one of the areas that saw a dramatic spike in pollution during the holiday. By 10 p.m., levels of particulate matter were logged at Level 5 (Very Unhealthy). Presto said that emissions of particulate matter are a health concern because they can affect people's lungs and hearts.

Illegal fireworks keep firefighters, animal control officers busy

By Ruth Brown

Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, July 8, 2014

The booms, pops, whistles and sparks of fireworks last weekend left Bakersfield's fire chief comparing neighborhoods to war zones and vowing to take a look at reducing the "chaos" that caused more than \$250,000 damage.

The Bakersfield Fire Department responded to 31 fireworks-related fires from 8 a.m. Friday to 8 a.m. Saturday. Last year, there were one or two fireworks-related fires. City fire crews responded to 483 fireworks-related calls between Thursday and Saturday.

"It's crazy and ridiculous," spokesman Danny Brown said. "This is the busiest Fourth, fire-wise, we have had in years."

Between Thursday and Saturday, 47 citations for deploying or possessing illegal fireworks were issued -- each \$1,500 -- and more than 700 pounds of illegal fireworks were confiscated. Friday, the number of personnel was boosted by more than half to 89; the average day has 56 on-duty personnel. Extra firefighters were also working Thursday and Saturday.

Bakersfield Fire Chief Doug Greener generally opposes the use of personal fireworks and said Monday he would take a long look at how illegal fireworks are regulated.

"Every year officers and firefighters get to a fraction of the illegal activity," Greener said. "It's just a volume issue."

Greener has no plans to make a proposal to the city council until he gathers more information. He plans to look at how Los Angeles, San Bernardino and Riverside counties handle fireworks enforcement.

He wants to reach a point that reduces what he called "this chaos."

On July 4 there were six structure fires, 11 brush fires and 14 other fires. Fireworks-related losses were \$254,400, including a major house fire caused by a firework landing on the roof.

"These neighborhoods are literally a war zone," he said. "It's like bombs going off and windows being rattled."

From July 3-5, the Kern County Fire Department received 650 calls for service, issued 60 citations -- also \$1,500 each -- for deploying or possessing illegal fireworks and seized 250 pounds of illegal fireworks, said Kern County Sheriff's Office spokesman Ray Pruitt.

Fireworks also led to an increase in lost and injured dogs, some of which were hurt by fireworks and others when they ran frightened into streets where they were hit by vehicles.

Since July 4, Bakersfield's animal control officers have brought 31 injured dogs to the Bakersfield Animal Care Center. Ten had to be euthanized.

From July 1 to Monday, 144 lost dogs were brought to the Bakersfield Animal Care Center, said Julie Johnson, the center's executive director.

"There is definitely an insane amount of animals (coming to the shelter), not just the typical strays," Johnson said. "They were terrified, stone cold terrified trying to run and hide in the shelter."

Californian columnist Lois Henry started a campaign to rid the county of personal fireworks by launching a Facebook page late last week called "BAN fireworks Kern County."

So far, the page has garnered nearly 400 likes.

[Bakersfield Californian commentary, Monday, July 7, 2014:](#)

I'm on record as anti-personal use fireworks

By Doug Greener

The Fourth of July holiday is over, and on Sunday morning I could still smell the odor of burned black powder in the air. Paper fragments, beer bottles, burned cardboard cones, spent sparklers and other debris remain thick on the streets of some developments. Another year of chaos, fouled air, people running wild with fire in the streets and neighborhoods described as "war zones."

Yes, there were the rare islands of sanity, with law-abiding families coming together to watch meager showers of sparks in their legal, State Fire Marshal approved, Safe-and-Sane cul-de-sac displays. If that was your Fourth of July celebration, you have my personal thanks and appreciation as the fire chief. But those, in my opinion, were the exception, and not the rule here. The war zone analogy is much more accurate and Bakersfield firefighters and police officers were under fire again and experienced it first-hand.

The fireworks debate continues in our city, one of the municipalities in our state that allows the sale of personal use pyrotechnics during the Independence Day holiday, including during drought years. Opinions are swatted back and forth like a Wimbledon finals match, with personal freedom being the foundational argument on both sides. The pro-fireworks camp cites the right to celebrate and fund-raise, and the anti-fireworks camp cites the right to not be under siege and burned out of their homes.

I'll go on record here as being anti-fireworks, or more specifically, anti-personal use fireworks. As a firefighter, there's really no other position for me to take. Don't get me wrong. I love a good, professionally produced fireworks show. Real fireworks, 1,000 feet in the air, huge explosions, great colors...impressive.

And safe. The instances where professional shows have malfunctions are very few and far between, and those shows are the only way to go from a broad public safety perspective. The City of Bakersfield, among other entities, produces a first-class professional fireworks show every year, with large aerial shells, and it's free of charge. But even that's not enough noise and fire power.

The Bakersfield Fire Department teams firefighters up with law enforcement in a joint effort to get BFD boots onto the frontlines to deal directly with illegal fireworks. The battle is not going well. This year, celebrants managed to burn down a garage, burn the roofs off several homes, burn down fences, trees, shrubs, grass and scare the life out of pets across the city.

The BFD/BPD Fireworks Enforcement Teams and BFD Arson Units responded to 413 illegal fireworks calls and issued 47 citations, and BFD fire stations responded to 31 working fire calls. There was at least one serious injury, and that individual was transported to a medical facility in southern California with severe eye damage from a firecracker. That, in my book, does not constitute a good holiday.

At around 9 p.m. that evening, the Fire Department Operations Center was in full swing, and radios in the fourth floor headquarters DOC facility were jammed with activity for fireworks related responses. The deputy fire chief of operations had the city-wide deployments well under control, and I headed out to the southwest, where the deputy fire chief of special services was providing oversight of BFD units assigned to the Riverwalk Park area.

The organized event there went off safely and flawlessly, until several teenagers with roman candles decided to "celebrate" afterward by shooting flaming balls into the dry brush in the river bottom. BFD firefighters were there for two hours cleaning up that mess, thanks to the parent who supplied the illegal fireworks to those kids. Do people not read? Or watch the news? Or listen to the numerous warnings issued by the Fire Department and every media outlet in the city? I just don't know where the warning message goes. Maybe up in smoke with the neighbor's roof.

On my way back to my own neighborhood, as I do every Fourth of July, I drove into random developments to get an up-close-and-personal look at what was going on. Same story, different year. Hordes of people watching illegal displays. When I turned on my red spot lights and tried to identify someone, anyone, the stampede begins with adults scurrying to get into garages and close doors, knocking over chairs, tables and beer bottles in the process. On my way out, a bottle rocket flies over my vehicle. Not our finest hour.

In the coming year, the Fire Department will examine our enforcement processes and take a closer look at other illegal fireworks control options, including some used by other cities. On behalf of the men and women of the Bakersfield Fire Department, I again strongly encourage everyone to consider attending a professional fireworks show next year as the only real "safe-and-sane" option.

Doug Greener is chief of the Bakersfield Fire Department. These are his opinions, not necessarily those of The Californian.

[Bakersfield Californian commentary, Tuesday, July 8, 2014:](#)

Valley air needs cleaning up, and oil companies must help

During the school year, I drive my two sons, ages 6 and 3, to school in downtown Fresno. As a Central Valley mom, I have to include one more step in my morning routine -- checking the air quality flag. For those who don't know, right under the American flag and the California flag at Yokomi Elementary is a color-coded flag representing the severity of air pollution that day.

My sons don't suffer from asthma, but I do. I always tell them it's healthy to spend as much time as possible playing outside. I still remember the day my older son, then in kindergarten, came home and told me: "We should play outside, but sometimes it's not good for us." That day, his teachers said he and his classmates had to stay inside during recess because the air was especially bad, represented by a red or purple flag.

As a third-generation valley resident, these issues aren't new to my family. Recently, I read a Viewpoints piece in The Sacramento Bee written by Jay McKeeman of the California Independent Oil Marketers Association. McKeeman's piece complained that the oil industry soon has to comply with Assembly Bill

32, California's climate and energy law, just like every other major polluter. It makes me wonder just how out of touch the oil industry must be these days.

For the past five years, I have worked in the environmental health program of Fresno Metro Ministry, a faith-based organization focused on learning, connecting and engaging to achieve healthy people and healthy places. Every day, I work with low-income families who are struggling to pay rent, eat healthy food and, yes, fill up the gas tank. Driving is still very much a way of life in the valley. The low-income communities and people of color I work with are disproportionately impacted by dirty air, putting them at higher risk for illness. Air pollution sends my friends and family to the hospital. It even shapes how kids' lungs develop, and as we know, it's often deadly.

More than eight years after AB 32 became law, it's shocking to hear that the oil industry is still not ready to cover the cost of reducing the harmful pollution that so deeply impacts my community. The industry spent \$56 million on Sacramento lobbyists in the last five years alone, just to fight a popular clean air law that threatens their record profits.

Now that transportation fuels are set to come under the "cap" of "cap and trade," they are suddenly too broke to afford the cost. Worse yet, they are threatening to maximize profits on the backs of consumers. The top five oil companies raked in estimated profits of \$211 billion in the past two years alone. Fresno families shouldn't have to suffer more just to subsidize oil industry riches.

The fact that the oil industry is kicking and screaming about AB 32 is ample proof that it's actually working for Californians. Cars are becoming more fuel-efficient, meaning that drivers don't have to fill up as often. In fact, the oil industry sold 523 million fewer gallons of gas in 2012 than in 2009, even as the economy grew. Californians will spend at least 30 percent less on fuel by 2020 than they did in 2012. Dangerous greenhouse gas emissions are declining. Once you know this, it's not at all surprising that those in the business of selling oil are upset that Californians are saving money by using less of their product. We shouldn't be fooled by their misinformation.

I want to live in a California that values my children's health as much as I do. One thing is clear: Californians want more clean air and less dirty politics.

Sarah Sharpe is the director of programs for Fresno Metro Ministry. This article originally appeared in The Sacramento Bee.