

Wildfires impacting Valley air basin

Hanford Sentinel, Wednesday, July 30, 2014

HANFORD — Wildfires that have destroyed homes and forced evacuations throughout Yosemite National Park are also bringing smoke impacts to the Valley air basin, according to a Valley Air District statement.

The French fire has been sending smoke to mountain communities in Merced, Madera, Fresno and Tulare counties, the statement said. But if wind shifts occur, more smoke from the El Portal, Dark Hole and Sand fires could also impact parts of the Valley.

The fires are expected to burn through the weekend and air officials urge residents to stay up-to-date with their local conditions.

In case of wildfire smoke exposure, Valley Air District suggests those who suffer chronic heart and lung diseases to limit their outdoor activity.

Residents who already have respiratory problems, children and elderly people are encouraged to follow doctor's orders when exposed to smoke.

People should stay in air conditioned places and if no air conditioner is available, officials suggest finding alternative shelter.

Valley Air District states that if you see or smell smoke, you are likely being impacted by it.

For more information on current wildfires and their impact on Valley air, visit

www.valleyair.org/wildfires.

Smoke from Sierra wildfires prompt health cautions in Merced

By Ana B. Ibarra

Merced Sun-Star, Fresno Bee and other papers, Wednesday, July 30, 2014

Wildfires in the Sierra Nevada are bringing smoke to the Valley air basin, triggering respiratory problems for Merced residents, local air officials said Tuesday.

The French fire, which is burning in the area between Rock Creek and Fish Creek campgrounds in the San Joaquin River drainage, is also reportedly sending smoke into foothill communities in Merced, Madera, Fresno and Tulare counties.

According to Anthony Presto, a spokesman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, officials are keeping an eye out for smoke from the El Portal and Dark Hole fires in Mariposa County and Sand fire in Amador County.

Currently, smoke from these fires is not affecting the Merced area, Presto said, but a shift in the wind could change that.

Smoke from fire is mainly particulate matter that can be very harmful to public health. Particulate matter can lodge deep in the lungs, causing illnesses such as emphysema and bronchitis as well as lung infections.

Particulate matter is so small that it can get into the bloodstream and increase the risk of a heart attack, Presto said.

Dr. Praveen Buddiga, an allergy and asthma specialist at Baz Allergy, Asthma and Sinus Center in Merced and Fresno, said he has seen an increase of patients with asthma stop by his offices.

"These fires have been significantly affecting children and adults with respiratory conditions, especially people with asthma," Buddiga said.

People with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, one of the most common lung diseases, are also greatly affected, he said. "These patients have a low threshold and smoke usually bothers them," Buddiga said.

Buddiga explained that smoke is an irritant that can cause serious damage to the respiratory lining and can also trigger nonallergic rhinitis, which involves chronic sneezing or having a congested, drippy nose.

The best way to protect oneself, according to Presto and Buddiga, is to stay away from smoky areas.

"If you see or smell smoke, it's most likely causing some damage to your lungs," Presto said. "The best thing to do is to remove yourself from an area that is being impacted and stay inside with filtered air."

Children are more vulnerable to experiencing respiratory problems because their immune systems are still developing, Buddiga said. The elderly are also vulnerable, as their immune systems are weaker.

Buddiga recommends that people with respiratory conditions keep the windows rolled up when driving and follow their doctor's instructions.

The smoke warning comes as people are battling temperatures around 100 degrees, which does not make breathing any easier because of the dry conditions it creates.

"With temperatures so high, people get dehydrated easily," Buddiga said. "So it's important they drink lots of water and fluids with electrolytes."

This week's high temperatures are expected to stay between 98 and 100, according to the National Weather Service in Hanford.

For more information on smoke and updates on air quality, people can visit the Valley Air District's wildfire page at www.valleyair.org/wildfires.

Sierra fires pour smoke into Valley

Porterville Recorder, Wednesday, July 30, 2014

Several wildfires burning in the Sierra Nevada are bringing smoke to the San Joaquin Valley air basin and are also putting a pinch on local fire-fighting resources.

Two large fires — one that began over the weekend northwest of Yosemite National Park and a second near Mammoth Pools east of Fresno — are burning mostly out of control.

The sky over Porterville was covered with smoke Tuesday morning, creating a burnt-orange hue over the landscape as heavy smoke from the Mammoth-area fire swept over the south Valley.

Officials from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued a health advisory Tuesday and said they expect the smoke to continue through the weekend.

The French Fire near Mammoth Pool Reservoir is sending smoke to mountain communities in Merced, Madera, Fresno and Tulare counties. Shifting winds may also bring smoke from the El Portal Fire near Yosemite, as well as the Dark Hole and Sand fires, to other parts of the air basin, including the Valley floor.

Smoke from wildfires contains particulates and ozone precursors. Residents are urged to be aware of their local conditions. Young children, the elderly, and people with existing respiratory conditions are especially susceptible to adverse health effects from these pollutants. Air District officials urge residents to follow their doctors' orders when exposed to wildfire emissions.

Sequoia National Forest Supervisor Kevin Elliott said many of the local forest's hand crews have been sent to fight fires. Some have been sent to the state of Washington, some to the El Portal Fire and others to the French Fire.

Air tankers that were stationed at the Porterville Airport have also been sent away, but Elliott said crews are still available and an air tanker can be summoned in a few minutes if needed.

Several Fires

The French Fire was reported near the Shuteye Peak lookout in the Sierra National Forest early Monday. The fire is burning in the area between the Rock Creek and Fish Creek campgrounds, in the San Joaquin River drainage.

The fire has scorched more than 2,000 acres, and is burning in steep, rugged terrain and heavy timber.

The El Portal Fire is burning one mile east of El Portal in oak, chaparral and grass. The fire, which had consumed more than 3,500 acres as of Tuesday afternoon, was 20 percent contained. The communities of El Portal and Foresta, as well as the Merced Grove of Giant Sequoia trees, are threatened. Residents of El Portal who had to evacuate Sunday were allowed to return to their homes Tuesday.

The Dark Hole Fire in Yosemite is four miles north of Yosemite Village. It has burned 500 acres of timber and brush, and is just 5 percent contained.

Since July 14, Yosemite National Park has experienced over 3,000 lightning strikes that have started more than 21 fires. Multiple thunderstorms, accompanied by rain, have either extinguished fires, or slowed their growth.

Elliott said the Sequoia National Forest has also had lightning strikes, but no fires have been reported in the local forest over the past several days.

UC Davis launches website to compare driving costs of electric vehicles

By Mark Glover

The Sacramento Bee, Wednesday, July 30, 2014

A new, UC Davis-developed website enables car buyers to weigh the potential costs of operating a plug-in electric vehicle.

Tuesday's launch of the "Electric Vehicle Explorer" site is a collaboration of the UC Davis Institute of Transportation Studies and the university's Plug-in Hybrid and Electric Vehicle Research Center.

"EV Explorer helps answer the question: 'Which car makes sense for me?'" said Michael Nicholas, lead researcher of the PH&EV Research Center, in a statement announcing the site launch.

EV Explorer can be accessed at <http://gis.its.ucdavis.edu/evexplorer/>.

The site utilizes the U.S. Department of Energy fuel economy database. Consumers can enter multiple variables to determine operating costs, including geographic location, commuter miles and travel mileage between two specific locales. The web tool then shows the projected annual gasoline and electricity fuel costs of up to four different EV models.

Models range from all-electrics, such as the Nissan Leaf, to gas-electric hybrids such as the Toyota Prius. Operating costs also can be compared with the projected costs of driving conventional-fuel vehicles.

Communications platform would link electric cars, utilities

David R. Baker

San Francisco Chronicle, Tuesday, July 29, 2014

Power companies need some way to talk to the growing number of electric cars plugging into the grid.

And it would help if all the cars, and all the companies, spoke the same language.

Now, a broad alliance of automakers and utilities plans to create a lingua franca for electric vehicles. Their goal: build a single communications platform that will let utilities glean information from and send commands to electric cars.

The benefits could be big.

If too many plug-in cars charge up at the same time in the same neighborhood, they can overload the local transformer, especially if electricity demand in the area is already high. The communications system envisioned by the new alliance would let utilities stagger charging times for their customers' EVs, as long as those customers agree.

More than that, however, a unified communications platform could be a building block for a smarter electric grid. Utilities could eventually use electric cars as batteries, not just holding power but feeding it back onto the grid when needed - to help balance renewable power or to prevent blackouts in case of emergency.

"They now have, essentially, grid storage at their fingertips," said Dave McCreadie, director of electric car infrastructure for Ford Motor Co. "Plug-in vehicles can absolutely play a big role in that."

Ford is one of eight automakers participating in the new alliance, which includes Pacific Gas and Electric Co., 14 other utility companies and the Electric Power Research Institute, a kind of utility-industry think tank known for tackling difficult technical issues. The alliance will be announced Tuesday at the Plug-In 2014 electric car conference in San Jose.

Most of the world's big automakers have joined the alliance, with BMW, Chrysler, General Motors, Honda, Mercedes-Benz, Mitsubishi and Toyota already participating. Notably absent from the list are Nissan, makers of the popular electric Leaf, and Tesla Motors of Palo Alto.

Nissan and Tesla did not respond by press time Monday.

Mark Duvall, a director at the Electric Power Research Institute, said any and all automakers are welcome to join the effort. That's the point, after all, creating one communications platform rather than a dozen.

"You don't have to do something different for Ford, for Nissan," Duvall said. "We create sort of a Rosetta Stone to communicate with all of them in one format."

The group has already created a basic version of the communications system and will test it this year with the help of California's three large, investor-owned utilities, all of which are part of the alliance. Roughly a third of the 225,000 plug-in cars sold in the United States in recent years reside in California.

The idea of giving a utility company control over their car's charging times won't appeal to all drivers of electric vehicles. Utilities will probably need to offer a reduced rate on electricity as a way to entice people to sign up. Utility customers will also benefit if the companies are able to avoid upgrading transformers and other elements of the grid to handle the increased load from electric cars.

"Our studies have shown that if the utilities can do a little bit of judicious management of electric car charging loads, nothing very heavy-handed, the customers can get everything they want, and the utilities can deal with very large numbers of electric vehicles without a lot of expensive changes," Duvall said.