

Oh, say can you see...air pollution on the Fourth of July?

By Barbara Anderson

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The Fourth of July produces more than bursts of red, white and blue in the sky. It creates plumes of rancid smoke that can cause breathing problems.

Officials at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District say the central San Joaquin Valley summer air already is laden with ozone pollution, and fireworks only add to the toxic mix.

Fireworks increase levels of dangerous particles in the atmosphere, including soot, ash and metals, the officials say. Older adults, along with children and people with breathing problems, can be especially affected by the bad air. The super-fine pieces of soot and metals also can get inside the bloodstream and dive deep into lungs. They have been linked to heart attacks and stroke.

Pollution levels on July 4 can spike four to five times higher than federal standards for healthy air. Such increases are due in part to backyard fireworks in Valley neighborhoods, air officials say.

"If Valley residents feel the need to enjoy fireworks, we urge them to exhibit their patriotism by attending a professional Independence Day event in their area instead of using personal fireworks," said Seyed Sadredin, the air district's executive director and air pollution control officer.

"Each year, people suffer serious health consequences from direct exposure in the neighborhoods where they live and breathe ... from fireworks activities that are entirely preventable."

Weather also will contribute to stagnant air on the Fourth.

The National Weather Service forecasts sunny and hot conditions Tuesday. Fresno's high is expected to be 102 degrees. Winds will be light in the morning, but pick up to 5 to 15 mph, with gusts to 20 mph possible. The overnight low will remain warm at 72 degrees.