

As Merced County temperatures continue to heat up, unhealthy air starts to spike

By Monica Velez

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Temperatures in Merced County will be in the upper 90s until hitting low triple-digits in the middle of the week, forecasters report. The warmer weather also has potential to bring unhealthy air quality to the county, according to air quality officials.

By Wednesday, Merced will hit 100 degrees and highs will be in the low 100s thereafter, said David Spector, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Hanford.

"For Merced County, looks like it's going to be sunny, dry and near seasonable temperatures," he said.

Along with the warmer weather comes unhealthy spikes in air pollution, San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials have said.

Since last week, air quality has hit unhealthy levels for sensitive groups four times, according to the district's Real-Time Air Monitoring website. Sensitive groups include anyone with asthma, lung or heart problems, along with children and seniors.

May to September is when the Valley sees spikes in ozone pollution, district officials said, the dominant pollutant in the summertime that can damage lung tissue. Ground-level ozone is a gas that's formed when a variety of pollution, from things like cars and factories, are baked in the sun.

As weather becomes warmer, sunnier and more stagnant, more ozone accumulates on the ground level, officials said. Asthma, emphysema and chronic bronchitis can all be aggravated by high levels of ozone.

District officials advise people to avoid outside activities when air quality starts becoming unhealthy. Valley residents can check Real-Time Air Monitoring through the district's website to see daily levels of ozone pollution at www.valleyair.org.

Weather officials have said people should try to stay indoors during the hottest points of the day, usually between 3 and 5 p.m. For those who will be working or spending time outside, officials advise them to stay hydrated, stay in a shaded area and avoid extraneous activities.

Calgary Fire 75 percent contained; evacuation notice lifted

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The Evacuation Advisory for residents of Wofford Heights for the Calgary Fire was lifted by the Kern County Sheriff's Office Sunday night at 8 p.m. According to the Kern County Fire Department, the fire is now 75 percent contained, but fire crews and equipment will remain in the area.

However, the Kern County Fire Department asks that residents still take precautions.

The department says to limit outdoor activities in areas where there is smoke from forest fires.

"The elderly, young children and people with asthma, chronic respiratory illness or heart disease may be particularly prone to adverse health effects from heavy smoke," said the fire department in a news release.

You can find air quality updates at valleyair.org.

The department also warns residents of the hazards of ash and debris from burned buildings. If residents come into contact with ash and debris, the department suggests the following:

Wear a dust mask.

Wear gloves, long sleeves and pants to minimize ash contact with skin.

Wet down ash and debris to minimize inhaling dust particles.

The Calgary fire ignited Friday near Calgary Road and Evans Drive in Wofford Heights.

While previously thought that five structures were lost, Kern County Fire Department Captain Tom Ellison said that number is now inaccurate.