

Thick smoke blanketing Stockton, San Joaquin County

Stockton Record, Tuesday, July 31, 2018

Firefighters are battling more than a dozen fires up and down the state, creating smoky conditions in the San Joaquin Valley.

And smoke from several fires, including the Carr, Ferguson and Lions fires, is making a large impact on San Joaquin County's air.

Because of the unpredictable conditions, air quality could be impacted for several more days, improving at times or getting worse, very quickly, Public Health Services of San Joaquin County said last week.

If you see or smell smoke, you are likely being impacted by it, the agency noted in a cautionary statement issued Thursday afternoon.

Health officials along with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District are monitoring the fires and air quality conditions and will alert residents if the situation worsens.

Particles carried by the smoke — a mixture of gases and invisible particulates from burning trees and plants — can cause breathing problems and other symptoms, even in healthy people. People with chronic heart and lung diseases are at greater risk for problems, including chest pain, rapid heartbeat, shortness of breath and fatigue, according to the health agency.

Children also are at higher risk from smoke because their airways are still developing and because they breathe more air per pound of body weight than adults. Also, they are more likely to be active outdoors where the greatest exposure is.

County Public Health Officer Dr. Kismet Brown last week provided a number of precautions residents should follow to protect their health and that of their loved ones, especially older and younger family members:

- If you see or smell smoke in your immediate area, stay indoors, if possible, with windows and doors closed and turn on the air conditioning to recirculate to avoid drawing outside air inside. Also in your vehicle, use the "recirculating" air function.
- If your home is too hot, consider leaving and visiting an indoor mall, library or someone else's home equipped with air conditioning.
- Those with heart or lung disease, older adults, pregnant women and children should avoid prolonged or heavy exertion outside. Outdoor activities should be moved or rescheduled for when the air quality improves. If that's not possible, at least take several breaks during the outdoor activity.
- Ensure family members with heart disease or lung problems such as asthma, bronchitis or emphysema are following their doctor's advice about medicine and their respiratory management plan. Seek help if their symptoms worsen.

Due to the current smoky air in parts of the county, residents are being asked to avoid adding more pollution by curtailing such activities as wood burning, lawn mowing, leaf blowing, driving and barbecuing.

For people who have not been previously diagnosed with a chronic lung or heart disease, health officials note that smoke can "unmask" or produce symptoms of those conditions such as chest pain or tightness, shortness of breath or fatigue. If they appear, contact a doctor.

It also is advised to keep airways moist by drinking lots of water. You also can breathe through a warm, wet washcloth to help relieve dryness.

Information on wildfire smoke and dealing with hot weather is available online from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at cdc.gov.

Other resources include:

- San Joaquin County Public Health Services at sjcphs.org.
- San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District at valleyair.org.

- Healthy Air Living at healthyairliving.com.
- Follow air quality conditions with the Valley Air app, available from Google Play or the App Store.

BAD AIR QUALITY

Fires trash air quality in SJ Valley

By Jason Campbell

Manteca Bulletin, Tuesday, July 31, 2018

With three large wildfires raging in Northern California, health officials are urging residents to take precautions when it comes to being outdoors and warning about the health risks from increased levels of pollution that will be impacting the air for the foreseeable future.

According to San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, a health cautionary statement has been issued to alert residents to the possible health effects stemming from the various forest fires that are ravaging parts of the state. The immediate impacts from the Ferguson Fire in Mariposa County – which has burned more than 57,000 acres near Yosemite National Park and is only 30 percent contained – are believed to be the cause of the majority of the smoke in the atmosphere that residents have been noticing for the past several days, although other fires like the Carr Fire outside of Redding and the Mendocino Complex Fire in Lake and Mendocino Counties are also believed to be contributing to the overall quality of air throughout the Sacramento and San Joaquin Valleys.

And the health impacts can be serious to those with medical conditions that are exacerbated by the smoke.

“Smoke from wildfires produces particulate matter which can trigger asthma attacks, aggravate chronic heart and lung diseases, and increase the risk of heart attack and stroke,” the health advisory reads. “Where conditions warrant, people with heart or lung disease should follow their doctors’ advice for dealing with episodes of particulate exposure.

“People with existing respiratory conditions, young children and elderly people are especially susceptible to the health effects of these pollutants. Anyone being exposed to poor air quality or wildfire smoke should move inside to an air-conditioned environment.”

The air quality in San Joaquin County in particular is currently listed as moderate – a designation where sensitive people and groups should reduce outdoor activities or unnecessary exposure.

But according to the San Joaquin County Public Health Department, given the volatile nature of the deadly fires that are burning across Northern California, those air quality conditions can change rapidly – at times improving before getting worse without any notice.

“The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is monitoring the air quality,” read a statement issued by the agency last week. “Even though the health risk may be rated as low, if you see or smell smoke, you are likely being impacted by it.”

Particles within the smoke, according to the release, can cause burning eyes, runny nose, coughing, scratchy throat, irritated sinuses.

San Joaquin County Public Health Officer Dr. Kismet Baldwin encourages all residents to learn whether they or their family members are at risk of being more susceptible to wildfire smoke – people with heart failure, angina, COPD, asthma or emphysema. Older people, Baldwin noted, are part of the group that needs to pay attention to the conditions, as do young children since their airways are still developing and they breathe more air per pound of weight than adults do.

Staying indoors whenever possible, especially for the classes and groups that are listed as high-risk, is encouraged.

The impact from the wildfires are expected to continue until they are extinguished.

'Disheartening' heat, air conditions continue

By Parker Bowman

Hanford Sentinel, Saturday, July 28, 2018

HANFORD — When it comes to the heat and the bad air quality accompanying it, there's no relief in sight, authorities say.

Smoke and debris from the Carr and Ferguson fires have prompted The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to issue a Valley-wide health caution.

"The Carr Fire exploded overnight and smoke will be making its way toward the Valley," Valley Air Pollution Control District outreach and communications representative Cassandra Melching said.

The air pollution, coupled with the extreme heat in the Valley is a potentially dangerous mixture, she said.

"It's a double whammy. These are two big fires and all that stuff will be headed our way. It's a little disheartening," she said.

Mariposa County's Ferguson Fire and the Carr Fire near Redding are both nearly 45,000 acres in size and are only about 29 and 3 percent contained, respectively. Air quality will be affected until the fires are extinguished.

Smoke from wildfires produces particulate matter which can trigger asthma attacks, aggravate chronic heart and lung diseases and increase the risk of heart attack and stroke. People with respiratory conditions, children and the elderly are especially susceptible to bad air conditions.

And while smoke and pollution will eventually make its way to the Valley floor, it's not easy to say when, Melching said, and mostly depends on winds and weather patterns.

If and when the Valley is hit with microscopic PM2.5 particles, Melching said it is advised that people stay inside and limit their activity outdoors.

"If you smell smoke or see ash, treat that as a Level 4 [and stay inside]" she said.

Extreme heat continues to oppress the Valley as the National Weather Service has extended its Excessive Heat Warning until 9 p.m. Sunday. The warning was originally expected to end Thursday evening, but high temperatures are expected to continue, with highs staying in the triple digits throughout the upcoming week.

Friday, Fresno broke its record for consecutive days with triple-digit temperatures with 21 in a row. The previous record was set in 2005.

"The significance of this is that Fresno is one of the two official climate stations in the South Valley," said WeatherAg chief meteorologist Scott Borgioli in a release. WeatherAg is a Visalia-based weather service.

Residents are encouraged to stay up-to-date with the District's Real-time Air Advisory Network (RAAN) by visiting www.myraan.com, which provides localized air quality data.

Season of fire

By Glenn Moore

Tracy Press, Friday, July 27, 2018

A team from Tracy is among the firefighters battling the Ferguson Fire in Mariposa County that forced the closure of Yosemite National Park on Wednesday.

The fire is one of several wildfires burning around the state, including the Marsh Fire 33 miles away in Clayton that is causing poor air quality for valley residents.

A four-man crew from Fire Station 92 left for Mariposa County on Wednesday morning with Tracy's bright green Office of Emergency Services engine, accompanied by engines from Lodi and three from Fresno fire departments.

Scott Arganbright, a battalion chief with Tracy's fire department, the South San Joaquin County Fire Authority, led another regional strike team to the Ferguson Fire on July 15, two days after the fire began. He spent eight days on the fire line.

Cal Fire reported that as of 6 a.m. Thursday, the fire had been burning for 14 days and had consumed 43,299 acres. It is 27 percent contained, and 3,686 people are fighting the blaze using 214 fire engines, 47 water trucks, 18 helicopters and 63 bulldozers.

Arganbright led a team of engine crews from the Lathrop-Manteca, Stanislaus County, Modesto and Turlock fire departments. They spent their first four days as part of a group assigned to protect nearly 200 homes in the Mariposa Pines subdivision and later helped support fire operations behind the subdivision.

Arganbright said the firefighters faced severe conditions on the fire line.

“The air quality is pretty bad. The inversion layer wouldn’t lift until mid- to late afternoon, so we were in the smoke all day,” he said. “The temperatures were anywhere from 100 to 105 degrees where we were. Once the inversion layer lifted, we would start to get the erratic fire behavior up there with spotting” — embers or sparks carried by the wind that start new fires — “in different directions.”

Firefighters were originally scheduled to work 12 hours at a time in the heat and smoke with a short period of time to rest.

“The recovery, it’s a lot harder on the body,” Arganbright said. “As we were there longer, we were able to transition to 24-hour shifts, which are still bad, but least you had 24 hours off.”

The fire is burning in steep, rugged conditions. Crews are cutting fire lines with bulldozers and by hand in effort to slow the flames.

Arganbright said the Tracy crew from Station 92 has been assigned to a group protecting homes and buildings in the Wawona area inside Yosemite.

“On these fires you can be moved all around. When we go out on an OES strike team, it is usually a two-week commitment,” Arganbright said. “The thing our guys mainly do is protect structures, life and property there. Especially the way this incident is working, you’re pretty fluid in there — it seems like you’re constantly on the move.”

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution District issued a health caution Wednesday related to smoke from the Ferguson Fire and other fires surrounding the valley. The district warned that smoke from the fires produces particulates that can trigger asthma attacks, aggravate chronic heart and lung disease, and increase the risk of heart attack or stroke.

People who have respiratory ailments, young children and the elderly are especially susceptible to the effects of smoke. Anyone affected should try to stay indoors in an air-conditioned area.

The Marsh Fire burning in Contra Costa County is also sending smoke into the area. Cal Fire reported that as of 6 a.m. Thursday, the Marsh Fire had burned 247 acres, and destroyed one home and three other buildings. It was 60 percent contained.

Tracy fire crews have also responded to several grass fires through the week.

On Sunday evening, a fire between Interstate 205 and West Canal Boulevard near Tom Paine Slough slowed traffic as smoke crossed the freeway. The fire, fanned by evening winds, ignited trees, grass and signs in its path and came close to a house and barn on Canal Boulevard.

Wednesday afternoon, a grass fire scorched hillsides near Patterson Pass Road and Interstate 580 while another fire burned on Patterson Pass Road near Midway Road. Firefighters had both fires under control within half an hour.