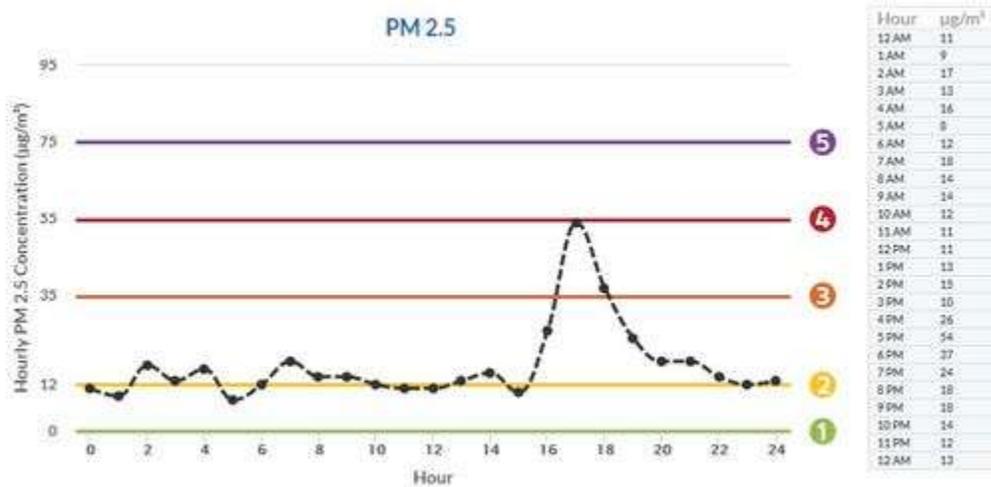


Particulate pollution spiked to dangerous levels in the Valley Tuesday night

By Kyra Haas

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PM 2.5 levels in Visalia on Dec. 10, 2019. (Photo: Real-Time Air Advisory Network)

Between dense fog and polluted air, the Valley had a rough Tuesday night.

Pollution spiked to unsafe levels across the Valley in the early evening, with Fresno and Clovis nearly off the charts for particulate matter pollution.

Moving into the foggy season, dangerous air days become more common, as the polluted air can become trapped low to the ground under high-pressure systems.

Last night was a prime example.

"Last night with the fog, you might as well have made that high-pressure system hit ground level because it just grabbed all the pollution in the air and hung onto it," said Heather Heinks, spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Around 5 p.m., pollution levels spiked across the Valley. In Fresno, the level of particulate pollution exceeded level 5 — the highest level on the Real-Time Outdoor Activity Risk scale. The RAAN is run by the Valley Air District.

In Visalia and Tulare, particulate pollution jumped from Level 2 to Level 4 in the late afternoon and early evening, meaning particulate matter concentration was recorded between 56 and 75 g/m³. At that level, the district discourages everyone from prolonged or vigorous outdoor activities.

At level 5, everyone should avoid being outdoors, according to the district. Level 5 starts at a particulate matter concentration of 76 g/m³. The concentration in Fresno was up to 110 g/m³ at 8 p.m. — more than 30 g/m³ higher than the threshold for the most unsafe level on the scale.

The sources of yesterday's spike were numerous, Heinks said. They include residential wood burning, ag burning and even combustion engines.

Particulate matter pollution tends to peak in the late afternoon and early evening, Heinks said.

Heinks said people should avoid using woodburning stoves unless absolutely necessary and check <http://www.valleyair.org/myraan/> to see the most current air quality for their area before heading outside to work out or attend an event.