

Free air quality tools to utilize during summer season

By Cassandra Melching, from the Kern Business Journal
The Bakersfield Californian, Monday, July 20, 2020

The potential threat to one's health caused by wildfires and general pollution trapped on the valley floor are key reasons that the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, along with other public health experts, developed a tool that would provide access to hour-by-hour local air quality conditions. The Real-Time Air Advisory Network is a simple, free tool to help business owners, schools and residents determine their local air quality and can be accessed at www.myRAAN.com or through the "Valley Air" app for iPhone and Android.

RAAN features outdoor activity guidelines for periods of poor air quality, which can help valley residents make informed decisions about when outdoor activities should be limited and for whom. These specific health recommendations are based on five different air-quality levels and are available at www.valleyair.org/ROAR.

The RAAN technology is health protective and can be very beneficial for people who suffer from preexisting heart and lung issues. RAAN offers access to actual concentrations of ozone and particulate matter and residents can choose to be notified by automated emails, text messages or app alerts to indicate significant changes in air quality for locations they have saved.

Another tool available to valley residents is the district's wildfire resource page, www.valleyair.org/wildfires. This page keeps valley residents informed about wildfires that are affecting air quality in the valley by providing information from the fire agency overseeing the fire and a link to RAAN so residents can check air quality at their location. The page also has great guidance on how to limit exposure to the harmful particulate matter found in smoke, as well as a few informational links to support agencies like the CDC and California Department of Public Health.

District staff also collaborates with the California Office of Emergency Response and public land managers to provide access on the wildfire resource page to any data available when portable air monitoring equipment has been deployed in areas significantly impacted by wildfire smoke.

For more information about the Valley Air District, call a regional office in Fresno 559-230-6000, Modesto 209-557-6400 or Bakersfield 661-392-5500 or visit www.valleyair.org.

Valley air district partnering with Nextdoor app to connect directly to neighborhoods

By Steven Mayer
The Bakersfield Californian, Monday, July 20, 2020

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has begun working with Nextdoor, the social networking service for neighborhoods, as a way to get hyperlocal in its efforts to reach valley residents in specific areas.

Heather Heinks, the air district's outreach and communications manager, reached out to Nextdoor users in the valley late last week to announce the district will be using Nextdoor's Service Provider Platform to let residents know "about unique air quality episodes — including but not limited to wildfires and windblown dust" — impacting areas and neighborhoods.

"Please keep in mind that your Nextdoor neighborhood network remains private to you and verified members of your neighborhood," she said in the Nextdoor news release. "We are not able to see what you and your neighbors are discussing."

But Nextdoor users can reply to valley air district posts, so there's the potential for interaction.

"We will not be monitoring Nextdoor 24/7, but will respond as soon as we are able," she said.

Users must not use Nextdoor as a reporting tool or to request emergency services. To share complaints about air quality or concerns about air quality issues in their area, users should visit the district's website at valleyair.org download the "Valley Air" app.

The air district has been working for years to make localized information more accessible to valley residents where they live. Sometimes dangerous spikes in pollutants can be hyperlocal, whether smoke from an industrial fire upwind of a neighborhood or community, or even wintertime residential wood smoke that remains at ground level due to the valley's shallow inversion layer.

Jaime Holt, the air district's chief communications officer, said Nextdoor is different from other social media outlets.

"For many people who use Nextdoor, it may be the only social media platform they're on," Holt said Monday. "Nextdoor really seems like a great next step for us."

As the wildfire season has lengthened, and the district has focused on alerting affected residents to the hazards of drifting smoke — which often originates outside the eight-county district — air district staff has continued developing new tools to communicate these alerts to those affected.

"With wildfire smoke, sometimes the particles are big enough that they don't show up on our monitors," Holt said. "Nextdoor is a great tool we can use to communicate those regional impacts."

California wildfires bring air quality, visibility warnings

By The Associated Press

Stockton Record, Monday, July 20, 2020

SUSANVILLE — Authorities warned of poor air quality in central and northern parts of California on Monday due to wildfires in rural areas.

In the northeastern region of the state, mandatory evacuations are in effect for the Hog Fire west of Susanville, which has grown to 9 square miles in Lassen County. Cal Fire says about 170 structures are threatened.

The National Weather Service issued a dense smoke advisory for Lassen and parts of Plumas and Sierra counties due to visibility as low as a quarter-mile.

An air quality alert was also issued for most of the San Joaquin Valley due to smoke from the Mineral Fire in Fresno County west of Coalinga.

The fire has grown to more than 44 square miles and was about half contained. Seven structures have been destroyed and 60 remain threatened.

Several smaller fires burned elsewhere in California, including a 450-acre blaze in Siskiyou County that triggered an evacuation of the tiny community of Hawkinsville.

2 firefighters hurt at scene of California blaze

The Associated Press

In the Modesto Bee, Mon., July 20, 2020

SUSANVILLE, Calif. - Two firefighters were injured Monday at the scene of a fire burning in rural northeastern California, fire officials said.

The two were taken to the hospital but their injuries and their conditions weren't immediately known, state fire spokeswoman Alisha Herring said.

The firefighters were called to battle the Gold Fire, which erupted Monday in Lassen County south of the community of Adin. The blaze has burned several hundred acres.

Another fire in Lassen County, the Hog Fire west of Susanville, prompted mandatory evacuations and threatened about 170 buildings after starting last Friday. That fire had grown to 9 square miles (23 square kilometers) .

Several other fires also were burning and authorities warned of poor air quality in central and northern parts of the state.

The National Weather Service issued a dense smoke advisory for Lassen and parts of Plumas and Sierra counties.

An air quality alert was also issued for most of the San Joaquin Valley due to smoke from the Mineral Fire in Fresno County west of Coalinga.

That fire had grown to more than 44 square miles (114 square kilometers) and was 62% contained. Seven structures have been destroyed and 60 remained threatened.

Several smaller fires burned elsewhere in California, including a 450-acre (182-hectare) blaze in Siskiyou County that triggered an evacuation of the tiny community of Hawkinsville.