

Trapped dirty air covers Valley Unhealthy conditions may linger through week.

By Barbara Anderson / The Fresno Bee

As if the winter gloom isn't enough to make central San Joaquin Valley residents pull blankets over their heads, air authorities say dirty air lurks beneath the gray cloud cover.

Air in the Valley was forecast to be unhealthy for people with sensitive lungs and heart problems today. And people are being asked not to burn wood in fireplaces and stoves to reduce tiny pieces of soot belched into the air.

"High pressure is now returned and it's provided a lid over the San Joaquin Valley and it's basically trapping the pollutants being made below," said Shawn Ferreria, a meteorologist at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Wood burning and combustion from vehicles mix to create tiny specks of pollutants that are small enough to penetrate deep inside lungs. The particles can trigger asthma attacks and heart problems.

When pollutant levels reach between 100 and 150 on an Air Quality Index, air officials discourage wood burning to help clear the air. Today the AQI level is expected to be 106 in Fresno, 104 in Modesto and 102 in Tulare.

Burning wood is banned when the AQI forecast is above 150, which is unhealthy for the public at large, not just those with sensitive lungs.

The AQI rating system ranges from healthy air at zero to a hazardous 300 or more.

Unhealthy air conditions likely will continue Wednesday and possibly throughout the week. Weather forecasters don't see a sunny break in the next few days.

"Persistent cloudiness" is the forecast, said Jeffrey Nesmith, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service office in Hanford.

The forecast calls for most high temperatures in the Valley remaining in the 40s and 50s, with overnight lows down to the low 40s. Chilly winter days such as these provide the perfect habitat for particles of pollution.

Microscopic pieces of soot and grime stay suspended in the damp air and a warm lid of air at higher elevations prevents the polluted air from escaping.

"The pollution being created is just sticking around," Ferreria said.

Ferreria said skies would be dirtier if wood burning wasn't restricted: "The wood burn rule and other district control measures have helped in reducing our pollutant levels."

Air pollution could soar if everyone decides to light up stoves and fireplaces to ward off the cold, he said.

Many people burn wood to reduce utility bills in winter. Natural gas prices increase in the cold months.

This year, natural gas prices are particularly high, said Jonathan Franks, a Pacific Gas & Electric spokesman. "Fuel prices in general are higher," he said. "Gasoline is higher, fuel oil is higher."

Franks said tips on reducing natural gas bills are available on the utility's Web site at www.pge.com.

Consumers also can call PG&E at (800) PGE-5000 to learn about programs for low-income customers and payment options.

King's ideals revisited at vigil Air quality, health care, education all addressed during Fresno event.

By Marc Benjamin / The Fresno Bee

Monday, January 17, 2005

The Rev. Walt Parry said he knows which causes slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. would champion if he were alive today and living in the San Joaquin Valley.

He would speak about equal access to health care and education.

And he would certainly want to open up dialogue about the Valley's air quality, said Parry of Fresno Metro Ministry.

Parry, who met and spoke briefly with King as a young seminary student in the early 1960s, made his remarks during a candlelight vigil to honor King in front of about 80 people Sunday night huddled in front of the fountain at Fresno City Hall.

All children and families have to deal with asthma and other air quality-related sicknesses, whether they have money or not, Parry said.

But the situation is more serious for families that are uninsured or underinsured or for those living in the shadows of polluting manufacturing plants and without the financial ability to move, he said.

The effort to remove pollution from our skies should not rely on incentives offered to industry, Parry said.

"It's a negative we have in common and we have not been making strides in addressing," Parry said. "No one has the right to make anyone sick....It's our responsibility to be more creative and more bold and find ways to clean the air."

The candlelight vigil was co-sponsored by the city of Fresno, the Women's International League for Peace & Freedom and the Fresno Center for Non-Violence. Vickie Fouts, who represents both peace groups, said the Valley's number of uninsured and underinsured and differences in quality of schools are obvious local problems that speak to a disparity needing to be addressed.

"In the northern parts of Fresno, you have brand new school buildings, and in south Fresno, schools are actually falling apart," she said.

Speaker Sean Radbill, a candidate last year for a Fresno Unified School District board seat, said our nation's priorities must be rearranged for America to realize King's dreams.

"The United States spent 19 times more on defense and law enforcement than for education," he said, referring to recent years' budgets.

News Briefs

S.F. Chronicle, Sunday, Jan. 16, 2005

A Bay Area air quality agency warned residents Saturday of the possibility of unhealthy air for some groups.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District reported that in most of the Bay Area, excluding the South Bay, the air was unhealthy for sensitive groups, warning that people with respiratory disease might want to limit outdoor activities.

The air was not polluted enough, however, to issue a Spare the Air warning.

Winter Spare the Air warnings are initiated when particulate matter in the air is greater than 150, according to the district. Particulate matter are very small particles in the air that can get into the lungs and aggravate respiratory problems, the district reported.

Burning wood, according to the district, causes much of the particulate matter in the air during winter.

In order to prevent the release of these pollutants, the air quality district is asking Bay Area residents to consider reducing or eliminating wood burning. If a fire is necessary, the district advises the use of only dry, seasoned wood.

Never burn glossy paper or painted wood in the fireplace, the district advises, since it can cause toxic chemicals to be released into the air.

Small fires should be started with soft woods such as fir or pine, and larger hardwood logs should be added when the fire is already burning well. Refueling frequently with small loads of wood will also create less smoke, which in turn will emit less pollution, the district reports.

A forecast by the agency suggests that pollution will be at a moderate level for the next few days, possibly escalating to unhealthy levels again on Wednesday.

[Letter to the Editor, Fresno Bee, Tuesday, Jan. 18, 2004:](#)

We aren't doing enough to clean the air in the Valley

As a resident of Fresno I would like to know why we have so much air pollution -- and why doesn't it seem like anybody really cares?

I have asthma and a lot of my friends have asthma. I think it is from all of the air pollution.

I know people who have moved here from different cities or states and once they started living here they got asthma.

Our Valley is one of the most polluted areas in the nation. Air pollution is getting bad and it is going to get worse if we don't do something about it. If we make the air quality better and the pollution less severe, we will be much healthier.

Courtney M. Banks, Fresno

[Letter to the Editor, Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Jan. 18, 2004](#)

Spellbinding events

On Jan. 6, I had the best time I've ever had reading the newspaper. Having just been "revved up" by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's State of the State speech, out comes *The Californian* with articles on:

- Supervisor Michael Rubio takes on Kern Medical Center. What a mess and what a blockbuster gutsy supervisor Rubio is sizing up to be.
- Syndicated columnist Dan Walters' piece on "Political reform going to top of state agenda." My gawd, ya think it's possible?
- The editorial headlined "Keystone Kops board" was a hoot.
- Then, be still my heart, the Community Voices column by Kenneth M. Cannon highlighting the pollution control problems we have in Kern County was great.

That man deserves some kind of award or better yet, he should run for office. He's got my vote. However, the powers that be will read his column and toss it.

Maybe *The Californian* should publish it once a week for about six months. It just might spur some action in the right direction. He delves into many facets of pollution, large and small -- gas-fueled buses, lawn mowers, development leaping ahead of preparedness for traffic, the \$100 million spent on studies to define the cause(s) of air pollution, etc.

As a GET board member 20 years ago, I suggested that we should have shuttles between downtown and major shopping areas. At last report, the tracks of the old electric cars we had in downtown are still there somewhere under the asphalt. Has anyone seen the charming bus in Visalia?

-- ROZ BINDER, Bakersfield