

## **With smoke from wildfires, valley air quality looks unpredictable for near future**

By Dakota Allen

Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, August 7, 2018

With wildfires burning throughout the state, in addition to recent local grass fires, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District continues to warn the public about poor air quality, including incidents of severely bad air that may occur sporadically in the coming days.

For a few hours late Saturday, the amount of fine particulate matter (PM 2.5) in the air spiked in Bakersfield and all eight counties across the San Joaquin Valley air district, to a Level 5, the highest level, where all people are advised to remain indoors.

By the next day, Bakersfield had clearer skies and air quality was back down to a moderate range. District officials said winds temporarily pushed smoke into the valley during that several hour period.

"All that pollution literally just inundated the entire San Joaquin Valley," said Cassandra Melching, outreach and communication representative for the air district.

Because the air can be safe at one point in the day and dangerous at another, depending upon wind flows, Melching said an air quality alert is standing for all areas.

On Saturday, regions farther north in close proximity to the fire were substantially affected, Melching said, with Oakhurst in Madera County reaching a PM 2.5 concentration of 246 micrograms per cubic meter. It takes only 75 micrograms to reach level five risk. Bakersfield hit 87 micrograms that same day.

"We can't quite say who is going to be impacted the most and when...It doesn't mean that every single day our air quality is bad," Melching said.

Glen Stephens, air pollution control officer of the Eastern Kern Air Pollution Control District, said the district has not released any alerts, but is tracking the smoke levels. He said there is less of a concern in eastern Kern County and mountain areas compared to valley locations like Bakersfield, but that there is still poor air quality.

"It's generally bad. Right now it's bad because of ozone, not because of the fire," Stephens said.

The best way to know whether it is safe to be outdoors is by tracking your location on the Valley Air app or online at [valleyair.org](http://valleyair.org). It is especially important for sensitive groups such as the elderly and those with asthma to remain cautious and updated.

Melching said to also be aware of the potential for ash in the air, which is most likely when temperatures cool down and is not monitored in the air quality levels.

"If you smell smoke, or if you see ash falling, you are being impacted," Melching said.

Ways to reduce your risk of being affected by the smoke are to limit outdoor exercise, stay hydrated, change your air filters and keep windows shut.

## **Unhealthy air levels send athletes indoors, others looking for the right kind of mask**

By Barbara Anderson

Fresno Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, Aug. 7, 2018

Air quality in Fresno hit the highest unhealthy level on Monday, fueled by smoke from six fires in California, including the Ferguson Fire that has burned into Yosemite National Park.

"This is unusual and remarkable and unpleasant," said Jaime Holt, a spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The district's air monitor in central Fresno recorded a RAAN Level 5 — the most unhealthy level for a one-hour reading. And the monitor in Clovis recorded a Level 4, the second-highest reading.

FUSD cancels outdoor activities

Fresno Unified has stopped all outdoor activities, sending a message Monday morning to athletic directors, coaches and trainers to not have teams outside.

Don Arax, the football coach at Bullard High School, said smoke was visible. "We lifted weights and we conditioned, and I cut it short," he said of Monday's workout. "Our kids are pretty well-conditioned and they were struggling a bit."

Arax said football practice could be done inside a rented soccer facility near Fresno State for the remainder of the week. "That's a pretty serious situation."

Clovis Unified pulled athletes inside on Monday, said Kelly Avants, district spokeswoman. Coaches get real-time air quality information from the air district and when air quality spikes to unhealthy levels, they bring athletes indoors, she said. And there's a standing order that no child is outside if smoke can be seen or smelled, she said.

In Oakhurst, outdoor high school football practices have been hit or miss since the Ferguson Fire started a month ago. Athletes are moved indoors when the air quality is bad, said Mike Berg, interim superintendent at Yosemite Unified School District. Air quality changes almost daily, Berg said. "Sometimes it's just elevated-smoke because the inversion layer holds it up and it's not coming down to the ground and sometimes I walk out and my car is covered in ash."

School opens next week, and Berg said the district has bought respirators for grounds workers and custodians who are working outside.

Looking for a mask?

A wet bandana, simple "dust mask" or a surgical mask are not effective in keeping smoke out of lungs, according to the California Department of Public Health.

People who want to buy masks to protect themselves from breathing smoke should buy a "particle respirator" that has either "N95" or "P100" printed on it, the department said. The masks are available in hardware stores and home repair stores and pharmacies. The mask should have two straps that go around the head. Masks with only one strap or with straps that just go over the ears will not be effective in blocking the smoke, the department said.

Breathing wildfire smoke can be equated to smoking cigarettes. Wildfire smoke is a mixture of nasty gases and fine, microscopic particles that have many of the toxic and carcinogenic components in cigarette smoke and can cause health problems, including triggering asthma attacks and aggravating chronic heart and lung diseases. The foul air also can increase the risk of heart attack and stroke.

What's worse?

How bad is Fresno's air? If this is any consolation, the air district says that when Beijing has its worst episodes of poor air quality, the Chinese capital will see particulate matter levels twice as high as what Fresno was experiencing Monday.

People can check on the air quality by using the air district's Real-time Air Advisory Network (RAAN). But the monitors don't always capture the larger ash particles and the air district says an area should be considered "unhealthy" if smoke can be seen or smelled.

At RAAN Levels 4 and 5 people should limit all outdoor activities, Holt said. Stay indoors with air conditioning, she said.