

SQF Complex Fire update: 12 injured, 104 homes destroyed. 'Heavy firefight' underway

By Joshua Yeager

Visalia Times-Delta, Tuesday, September 16, 2020

Tulare County Fire Chief Charlie Norman delivered a harrowing update Tuesday night on the SQF Complex Fire that exploded back to life over the weekend, nearly doubling in size and prompting evacuation orders across the Sierra Nevada foothills — including portions of Three Rivers.

Norman added that 14 firefighters have suffered minor injuries in their battle against the lightning-sparked blaze. They are all expected to return to the frontlines after recovering.

Fortunately, no civilian injuries or deaths have been reported, the chief said.

In a recorded briefing, he gave an overview of the destruction and structure loss that has hit communities across the Sequoia National Forest, where the SQF Complex has scorched more than 100,000 acres since Aug. 19.

Twenty-two homes in Alpine Village, 35 in Sequoia Crest, and 42 in Cedar Slope have been destroyed by the out-of-control fire, according to preliminary "windshield surveys," Norman said.

The department won't have a full accounting of the damage until it's safe to send assessment teams into the scorched communities.

In the meantime, residents of those area can contact the fire department for more information.

"All these structure losses with this fire burning I take very personally. I'm born, raised and never left Tulare County. Any of these things that hurt our community hurt me, too," a visibly emotional Norman said.

Cal Fire officials said more than 3,100 structures are still being threatened and 104 have been destroyed.

'Heavy firefight' for Ponderosa, Camp Nelson

Crews are engaged in a "heavy firefight" to defend Camp Nelson and Ponderosa, two of the forest's most popular tourist destinations.

A status update on the former could not be given as firefighters grapple with the fast-moving flames.

The fire has made runs toward Ponderosa since establishing itself in Cedar Slope on Sunday. Hot shot and Tulare County crews will work overnight to fortify the mountain towns.

"We will be busy tonight defending those structures in and around Ponderosa," said Brent Olso, operations section chief.

He added that the Jordan Peak Lookout was destroyed when the fire made its way toward Sequoia National Park, with embers blowing as far as three miles ahead of the fire perimeter.

The rush of fire also tore through Balch Park and Mountain Home Demonstration State Forest, though damage estimates are unknown at this time.

As of Wednesday morning, the SQF Complex was 12% contained and had chewed through 114,320 acres of forest land.

Millions of dead trees waylaid by a historic drought and bark beetles have proven particularly challenging for crews and have fed the fire's growth, along with strong gusty winds that forecasters say will continue until at least Thursday.

Cal Fire Incident Command Team 6 has been involved with the Sequoia Complex since Monday.

Leaders with the state's fire agency are "getting up to speed" with the situation and should start to take a more active role in the battle as the week goes on, Olso said.

Cal Fire will manage the western portion of the blaze beginning Wednesday.

Evacuees seek shelter

On Monday, evacuees filled the Exeter Memorial Building parking lot. Dozens of residents of Three Rivers heeded evacuation orders and turned to the Red Cross for help finding lodgings and other resources.

"We just have to wait it out, see what happens and hope for the best," Cecei Roberts, a Three Rivers resident of 20 years said, seated on a bench outside the evacuation center. "When the evacuation order is lifted, we'll go back and hope that our house is still standing."

"If not, we'll start all over," she said, tearing up.

The one comfort Roberts said she had was knowing that her daughter, Hannah, dog, Captain Crunch, three cats and fish were all safe.

Erin Bryan, a Tulare County mental health therapist assisting distressed evacuees, said her "heart was completely warmed" by the outpouring of support from across the community.

Exeter Memorial Manager Howard Fackler said he had received "a phone call every 15 minutes for the past six hours" from concerned residents asking how they could help.

"I feel gratified to be part of a community that cares this much," he said.

The facility did not need any supplies as of Monday evening but the Red Cross welcomed financial donations, Fackler said.

Because of COVID-19 restrictions, the disaster relief organization is putting evacuees up in local hotel rooms rather than shelters, where social distancing is impractical.

Seeping under doors, bad air from West's fires won't ease up

By Sara Cline and Gillian Flaccus, Associated Press

Fresno Bee, Modesto Bee and other papers, Wednesday, Sept. 16, 2020

Dangerously dirty air spewing from the West Coast wildfires is seeping into homes and businesses, sneaking into cars through air conditioning vents and preventing people already shut away by the coronavirus pandemic from enjoying a walk or trip to the park.

People in Oregon, Washington state and California have been struggling for a week or longer under some of the most unhealthy air on the planet. The acrid yellow-green smog may linger for days or weeks, scientists and forecasters said.

It is also a sign of things to come. With wildfires getting larger and more destructive because of climate change and more people living closer to areas that burn, smoke will likely shroud the sky more often in the future.

"I don't think that we should be outside, but at the same time, we've been cooped up in the house already for months, so it's kind of hard to dictate what's good and what's bad. I mean, we shouldn't be outside period," Portland resident Issa Ubidia-Luckett said Monday.

The hazy air closed businesses like Whole Foods and the iconic Powell's Books in Portland and suspended garbage pickup in some communities. Pollution and fire evacuations canceled online school and closed some college campuses in Oregon.

"It is so bad that you can likely smell (smoke) inside your house," said Sarah Present, the health officer for Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington counties. "In some areas, the air quality is so hazardous it is off the charts of the EPA's rating scale."

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality's Air Quality Index is considered hazardous between 301 and 500. Values above 500 — which multiple Oregon cities have reported during the past week — are beyond the index's scale.

The air quality agency extended an alert to Thursday, and the air was so thick that Alaska Airlines stopped flights to Portland and Spokane, Washington, until Tuesday afternoon.

Zoe Flanagan, who has lived in Portland for 12 years, braved the smog to walk her two dogs Monday. In desperation, she and her husband turned on the heater a day earlier because it has a better filter than their air conditioner.

She said the air made her feel hungover, despite not drinking. She could not get enough water, and she had a headache. With health officials urging people to stay inside, the poor air also took away the simple pleasure of being outdoors during the coronavirus pandemic.

"Those backyard hangouts that we all got so used to as our one saving grace are now totally gone, and we just have to keep practicing letting go of what normal is," Flanagan said.

Smoke can irritate the eyes and lungs and worsen some medical conditions. Health experts warned that young children, adults over 65, pregnant women and people with heart disease, asthma or other respiratory conditions were especially vulnerable.

"The lasting effects of breathing the small particulates in the wildfire smoke can be extremely dangerous," Present said. "It can lead to heart attacks, irregular heart rhythms and even death."

The region has had a significant increase in visits to emergency rooms due to air quality, officials said Tuesday.

Smoke from dozens of wildfires is pooling in California's Central Valley, an agricultural region that has some of the state's worst air quality even when there are no flames. Some parts of central California are not likely to see relief until October, said Dan Borsum, the incident meteorologist for a fire in Northern California.

"It's going to take a substantially strong weather pattern to move all the smoke," Borsum said at a briefing Sunday.

Joe Smith, advocacy director for Sacramento Loaves & Fishes, which helps homeless people, said California's capital city has not seen consistent blue skies in weeks. People without homes have been grappling with an onslaught of disasters this year.

"Some of the toughest folks you'll ever meet are people who live outdoors, unhoused, but it is getting to them," Smith said. "We've got COVID-19, followed by excessive heat wave, followed by smoke. What's going to start falling out of the air next on these poor folks?"

Twana James, who lives in a tent in Sacramento, coughed several times, trying to clear her throat, saying her voice is not usually so hoarse.

"Everything is covered in ashes," she said by phone Monday. "It's hard to breathe."

Places like the Oregon Convention Center in downtown Portland are being used as shelters for people who need a dose of healthy air. Typically during wildfires, people can escape to other areas of the state to breathe easy, said Dylan Darling, a spokesman for the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality.

"That's what's standing out — there just isn't a place in Oregon right now to find fresh air," Darling said. The level of pollution lingering for so long and so widely "really stands out in the state's history," he said.

Oregon needs a "perfect balance" of winds to disperse smoke but not exacerbate the fires, said Tyler Kranz, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service's Portland office.

"We need the winds to get the smoke out of here," Kranz said. "We just don't want them to be too strong, because then they could fan those flames, and all of a sudden, those fires are spreading again."

Ubidia-Luckett was eating outside Monday at a popular burger place east of Portland with her 6-year-old son, but they moved inside because of the bad air, which had postponed the boy's first day of kindergarten for the second time.

"That's the hard part for little kids. They're so cooped up so what do you do?" she asked. "Eventually, they want to go outside."

Sacramento area air quality much better this morning. But will it stay that way?

By Michael McGough

Modesto Bee, Fresno Bee and other papers, Wed., Sept., 16, 2020

Air quality is greatly improved Wednesday morning in the Sacramento area, as wind patterns continue to push smoke from California's wildfires away from the capital.

The air quality index reading downtown came in at a very low 12 as of 6:30 a.m., according to local air district monitors at SpareTheAir.com, and remained in the green-shaded "good" range of AQI 0 to 50 across the majority of Sacramento and Yolo counties.

That makes it the region's best air day in weeks, and an especially stark contrast from pollution levels that spiked above AQI 200 over the weekend and made it very unhealthy to spend any significant amount of time outdoors.

Now, just three days later, the air quality is almost ideal — in the immediate Sacramento area and the Bay Area, at least.

As record acreage burns statewide, and as Sacramento continues to be surrounded in multiple directions, albeit with distance, from multiple massive wildfires that aren't fully contained, onshore winds from the Bay Area and a Delta breeze helped clear near-surface smoke away from the middle of the Sacramento Valley, according to the National Weather Service.

Fortunately for Sacramento, the only major blaze burning upwind of the capital city at the moment is the LNU Lightning Complex in the North Bay. That fire complex, burning since Aug. 17, has scorched over 363,000 acres, but it is 98% contained and therefore producing minimal new smoke, according to Cal Fire.

Forecasts for near-surface smoke from the National Weather Service, as well as the AirNow map from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, each show air quality is still very poor throughout much of the rest of California. That includes the northern reaches of the state; roughly the southern third of the Central Valley, including Fresno and Bakersfield; and the Sierra Nevada mountains and foothills, including areas just east of Sacramento.

AQI levels remain elevated throughout most of Placer, El Dorado, Nevada and Amador counties, and are in the "unhealthy" range above 150 near Lake Tahoe as of Wednesday morning.

Spare The Air currently forecasts that most of Sacramento, El Dorado, Yolo and Solano counties will remain in the "moderate" AQI range of 51 to 100 later Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. AQI is also predicted to stay below 150 in Sacramento this weekend.

Placer County's air will be poorer, in the range of 101 to 150 deemed "unhealthy for sensitive groups," such as those with asthma, those days.

As Spare The Air warns, though, air quality "can change quickly at different times during the day due to wind shifts and vertical mixing," and if you can smell smoke, you should avoid outdoor activities.

Closing the door to smoky skies: Improving indoor air doesn't have to knock the wind out of you

By Darrell Smith

Modesto Bee, Fresno Bee and other papers, Wed., Sept.16, 2020

Smoke-choked skies above a California on fire have rendered air quality unhealthy for weeks. In the Sacramento region, the sun has managed to peek out from the heavy haze of wildfires burning across the state, but maintaining and improving air quality indoors during this year's destructive fire season remains a challenge.

But air quality experts and officials here in Northern California have tips and advice to keep the bad air out and indoor air as fresh as possible — everything from finding the right air filter to choosing which appliances to use to designating a clean air room in your home.

"The bottom line: Give yourself as many hours of clean air as possible," said Brett Singer, leader of the Indoor Environment Group at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and an international expert on indoor air quality.

That means closing doors and windows, fireplace dampers and staying indoors as much as possible, Singer said, but those are only first steps. Adjust your ventilation system to “fan only,” or “fan - on.” That recirculates air instead of drawing it from outdoors. Replace air filters and look for the filter’s MERV — or Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value — rating. The rating should be 13 or better, Singer said.

Many manufacturers use the MERV industry standard. Manufacturer 3M uses its MPR system. Honeywell uses its FPR standard. Look for a Honeywell FPR of 8-10, while an MPR of 2200 or better is preferred for 3M filters.

Whatever the filter, Singer said, get the best one you can. Home ventilation systems are designed to move a lot of air. Recirculating the indoor air through fresh filters will remove those particulates from the air. A portable air cleaner can also help. A makeshift version can be fashioned by attaching a filter to the back of a box fan, Singer said.

Smaller spaces are better

Singer also recommends finding a smaller indoor space or room.

“Spend as much time as you can in a smaller space. If you can spend hours in another room, do it. Take the opportunity to get to cleaner air,” he said. “It’s not all or nothing,” Singer added. “Any bit to improve the air, you should.”

Yolo and Solano counties have battled smoke and worse from the voracious LNU Lightning Complex that has devoured more than 363,000 acres and is now 97% contained. Stephanie Holliday of the Yolo-Solano Air Quality Management District had a few recommendations:

- Keep windows and doors closed
- Change or replace air filters. HEPA — or High Efficiency Particulate Air — filters are most effective. HEPA filters can remove dust, pollen, mold, bacteria and the fine particulate matter carried in smoke.
- If your home has a whole house fan, don’t use it. The fan draws air in from outdoors. Rather, adjust your home’s ventilation system to “recirculate.”
- Limit dusting and vacuuming. That may seem counter-intuitive, but Holliday says though a vacuum picks up dust and debris, it can also release particulates into the air. For surfaces, clean by using a damp cloth to keep down dust, she said.
- Avoid frying foods. And avoid using gas stoves. Smoking or burning candles or incense are also bad ideas. All release emissions into the air.
- Designate a “clean air” room in your home, one room shut off from the rest of the home and away from exposure to smoke that may enter from outside or from dust or fumes indoors. This is especially useful for those with heart and lung problems, the very young and older seniors. The Environmental Protection Agency has information on how to set up a clean room in your home as well as information on wildfires and indoor air quality at epa.gov.

Find more information at Yolo-Solano’s website, ysqamd.org, or at airnow.gov, which also links to air quality boards across the state including [Placer County Air Pollution Control District](#) and [Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District](#).

Also find tips [here](#) and [here](#) from the experts at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory’s Indoor Environment Group.

Creek Fire live updates: 220,000 acres burned, 18% containment; air at unhealthy level

By Joshua Tehee

Modesto Bee, Sacramento Bee and other papers\, Wed., Sept., 16, 2020

The Creek Fire, which has been burning in the Sierra National Forest since Sept. 4, threatened to spread north into the Inyo National Forest on Tuesday.

As of Wednesday morning, the wildfire had burned 220,025 acres and was 18% contained.

Assessment puts the number of destroyed structures at 632, including 75 cabins at Huntington Lake. Fifty-two structures have been listed as damaged. The assessment is 50% complete and those numbers will change.

The cause of the fire remains under investigation.

A much smaller fire continues to burn 43 miles northeast of Clovis, on the eastern fringe of the Dinkey Lakes Wilderness west of Courtright Reservoir. The Bullfrog Fire has burned 900 acres since it started Sept. 9. The fire has no containment.

Meanwhile, the Sequoia Complex Fire, which has been burning in Golden Trout Wilderness Area of Sequoia National Forest since Aug. 19, has grown to 114,320 as of Wednesday morning. It is 12% contained.

8:30 a.m.: Air quality should improve in Fresno, Madera counties

As expected, the air quality will remain in the unhealthy category for most of the central San Joaquin Valley on Wednesday — the exception being San Joaquin and Stanislaus counties to the north, where air quality will be unhealthy for sensitive groups.

Still, the forecast is a considered an improvement from Tuesday, when Fresno and Madera counties were forecast near hazardous levels.

As of Wednesday morning, Fresno was already above level 5 for PM2.5 particulates, according to the Real-Time Air Advisory Network.

There is potential for gusty winds along the Sierra Nevada crest on Thursday and Friday, according to the National Weather Service. This could impact the Creek Fire and pose management challenges, though the hazy skies would likely remain as California's other wildfires continue to affect the area.

There is a low chance of rain, or more likely sprinkling, into Friday, according to the weather service.

Creek Fire already 13th largest in California history. Concerns remain for wind forecast

By Thaddeus Miller

Fresno Bee, Tuesday, Sept. 15, 2020

The Creek Fire has burned 332 square miles of the Sierra National Forest and officials said Monday they expect gusty winds this week to add to the difficulty in fighting the blaze.

More than 212,700 acres have burned in wildfire that's destroyed nearly 600 structures in Fresno and Madera counties, fire officials said Monday in a virtual news update.

The Creek Fire is already the 13th largest in the state's history, CalFire officials said, and it is just 16% contained.

The next couple of days are expected to be sunny with highs in the low 90s, which is not ideal for fighting flames, fire officials said. Then on Thursday and Friday, wind is expected to pickup, which can help flames move.

The temperature is expected to drop late in the week, according to the National Weather Service in Hanford, but there is no rain in the forecast.

The poor air quality also affects how much air support can aid fire crews, according to Fire Chief Tyler Monroe of the Great Basin Team 1 Operations Section.

Fighting the flames

Fire crews are working the perimeter and preparing structures around Shaver Lake in case the smoke clears in the lower elevation, especially around Blue Canyon.

Winds have increased fire activity in Jose Basin and pushed the fire across the line toward structures. Firefighters were engaged in structure protection in the area on Monday morning and worked to re-establish a perimeter control line and mop up hot spots as the wind shifts In the Tamarack area.

A fire line is being established around China Peak, where crews also mopped up much of the day, officials said.

More than 2,900 people have evacuated the area and are receiving three meals a day, according to Jean Rousseau, the Fresno County chief administrative officer.

He said hundreds of pets and livestock removed from the area have filled the Clovis Rodeo grounds. So many of them, especially small animals, are expected to move to the Fresno Fairgrounds.

Madera County

In Madera County, firefighters worked to clear Road 81 and Mammoth Pool Road so utility companies can restore service before residents are allowed to return.

Protection measures are in place at Devil's Post Pile National Monument and Red Meadows. Fire suppression work continues on the west side; miles of line extend from Redinger Lake north to Cascadel Woods and Central Camp.

The fire is about five miles from Bass Lake, officials said.

Evacuation orders

Evacuation orders were reduced in several zones within the Creek Fire on Monday, allowing some people to return to their properties.

The zones are clumped on the fire's southern edge, near Watts Valley and Hog Mountain and include Zone F5L, Zone F5M, Zone F5N, Zone F6A, Zone F13C, Zone F13D and Zone F13E.

Another set of orders were lifted in areas near Oakhurst, including M49, M50 and M51. Zone M52 has been reduced from an evacuation order to a warning.

Officials warned that residents who decide to return to their homes in warning areas should remain ready to leave the area immediately if ordered.

The zones correlate to specific locations, that can be found on fire's official evacuation map.

Preventive measures have helped Kern communities stay 'lucky' amid record wildfire year — so far

By Quinn Wilson

Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Sept. 15, 2020

While blame has been placed on California's forest management as potentially being a primary factor in many of this year's historic wildfires, Kern County could be reaping the benefits of preemptive measures taken by local, state and federal fire agencies in the winter and spring.

At least so far.

On Monday while visiting Sacramento, President Donald Trump blamed the state's leaders for "failing" to rake leaves and clear dead timber from forest floors, according to the Associated Press. It wasn't the President's first time citing poor forest management as playing a role in the fires that have been raging across the state.

"When you have years of leaves, dried leaves on the ground, it just sets it up," Trump said. "It's really a fuel for a fire. So they have to do something about it."

Christine McMorrow, public information officer for CalFire, said that any claims of poor forest management would "discount" the work her agency's team does year-round throughout the state.

"We're always doing some sort of fire reduction activities. Something is always happening," she said.

CalFire contracts with Kern County and regularly provides funds for annual "fuels treatment" programs, McMorrow said. She said that prescribed burns are typically facilitated from throughout November to early June.

She explained that in 2017, CalFire recognized more needed to be done in terms of “thinning” brush and timber throughout many of the state’s forests. Since then, she said her agency has “ramped up” its thinning efforts and will continue doing so.

“There’s a lot of factors (for this year’s wildfires), it’s not just one thing,” McMorrow said. “(Brush and timber buildup) didn’t just happen in the last five years. That’s decades of a certain kind of attitude towards prescribed burns.”

She said that residents in certain parts of the state had previously been resistant to controlled burns.

Even so, locally, the Kern County Fire Department undertook efforts throughout the recent winter and spring months in order to “create a safer environment for our communities,” according to Andrew Freeborn, KCFD public information officer. Their hundreds of management projects included controlled burns, clearing brush, timber and other fuels throughout the county.

“We work with various crews and seasonal employees throughout winter and spring months,” Freeborn said. “It’s typically the work most people don’t see going on.”

He explained that most of the work is done around more populated areas throughout the mountains such as Alta Sierra, Tehachapi, Pine Mountain Club, Frazier Park and Lebec. KCFD also concentrated on a stretch of State Route 223 for controlled burns, as it’s a common area for brush fires to occur, Freeborn said.

“We’ve seen historically that the section of road on (State Route 223) gets brush and dry grasses on the side of the road and there are a lot of vehicle fires that happen there,” Freeborn said.

These are done to prevent fires from becoming established, moving onto the base of the mountain, and impacting the community of Bear Valley Springs or going into the Hart Flat area, Freeborn said.

Gabe Garcia, Bakersfield field manager for the Bureau of Land Management, said his agency focused this past winter on clearing brush and having controlled burns in areas outside of Kernville. He said about 50 acres were cleared during this recent project.

“We’ve made a nice fire break between BLM lands and the community,” Garcia said. “We typically do certain areas annually we think are prone to fire.”

He described Kern County as being “lucky” so far when compared to wildfires throughout the rest of the state. With that, he emphasized residents need to stay “vigilant” in continuing to avoid fire risks.

“(BLM has) implemented an open flame ban so there are no campfires of any sort in our campgrounds or lands to mitigate the continued fire risk,” Garcia said. “Typically we don’t do a full ban, but we decided to call a total ban on all flames. (The ban) would last until November or December because there’s not a lot of rain in the forecast for this fall.”

There’s always risk, particularly in recent months when record wildfires have swept across California. The only significant one that took place in Kern County this summer was the Stagecoach Fire in the Lake Isabella area, which occurred in early August.

Freeborn said that every month in the state is wildfire season, and KCFD is prepared to battle those blazes year-round. He said that the community can support KCFD and prevent wildfires by staying educated on what’s happening both locally and statewide.

“Educate yourselves on what you’re seeing in other cities and other counties for a long-term perspective,” Freeborn said. “If you want changes or additional services, those requests have to be made.”

In the short term, Freeborn said efforts as simple as maintaining “defensible spaces” around property, keeping up on car maintenance, not dragging chains from vehicles and avoiding hitting rocks while mowing the lawn can be integral in preventing unnecessary fires.

“It’s the small things that make such a big difference,” Freeborn said.

Creek Fire live updates: Evacuation plans laid out for Inyo National Forest as fire moves north

By Manuela Tobias and Anthony Galaviz
Sierra Star, Monday, September 15, 2020

8:30 a.m.: Weather forecast in San Joaquin Valley

The weather forecast remains relatively steady in the San Joaquin Valley, according to the National Weather Service. The NWS is predicting south to southwest winds will take more of the smoke out of the region, clearing the path for more sun and slightly warmer temperatures Tuesday. The weather is expected to cool down again in the coming days.

The forest service also predicts “a slight chance for a shower or thunderstorm” on Thursday in the SQF Complex, bringing some relief to the fire.

The air quality in the central Valley has worsened, however, with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District forecasting air quality levels in Fresno at 280 and in Madera at 290. Both fall into the very unhealthy category.

Air quality is expected to continue to improve over the next few days, according to the national forest service.

Creek Fire live updates: Some evacuations downgraded, allowing for returns; poor air quality

By Joshua Tehee
Sierra Star, Monday, September 14, 2020

8 a.m.: Heavy smoke, bad air to remain through mid-week

It should be obvious, given the ash seen falling from the sky in many parts of the central San Joaquin Valley, but dense smoke from California’s wildfires, including the Creek Fire, continues to impact the air quality in the region and looks to remain heavy through Wednesday, at least.

The National Weather Service reports an upper-level ridge of high pressure shifting eastward to the Four Corners Region on Monday, keeping winds in the central Valley light for the next 48 hours.

“That means the smoke that’s upon us will have nowhere to go for the next two days and will essentially remain trapped,” the NWS said in its daily forecast discussion.

The densest smoke will be over the foothills and higher elevations of the Sierra.

High-altitude winds should come in by Wednesday, blowing smoke into Nevada and offer hope for improvement in air quality. “That’s no guarantee, especially if new fires break out over the higher terrain to our south and west during the next two days,” the NWS said.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is forecasting air quality levels in the region between 152-187, which falls into the unhealthy category. As of 8 a.m. Monday morning, the district’s Real-Time Air Advisory Network had Fresno’s particulate levels at three times the threshold for level five, where everyone should avoid outdoor activity.

Wildfire Smoke Blanketing Valley Is Huge Health Hazard, So Stay Indoors

By Nancy Price
GVWire, Monday, Sept. 14, 2020

Six major wildfires burning in Northern California are creating dangerous smoky conditions for Valley residents, who are urged to stay indoors as much as possible — even if it means the dog doesn’t get walked.

The six fires have already burned over 2,800 square miles — larger than the entire state of Delaware — and aren’t close to being contained, so the thick smoke layer will be with us for a few more days at least.

At this point, it doesn’t matter which way the wind blows in the Valley because we’re surrounded on all four sides by wildfires, said Jon Klassen, director of strategies and incentives for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution.

Although the San Joaquin Valley has previously seen spikes in air pollution similar to what is being recorded now, the length of time combined with the severity of the bad air is unprecedented, he told reporters Monday morning during a Zoom media briefing.

Right now, a high pressure system parked over the Valley is acting like a lid to hold the smoke from the nearby Creek and SQF Complex fires on top of Fresno, Clovis, and Madera, Klassen said.

The high concentration of smoke is expected to continue to Thursday or Friday, when breezes may blow smoke from those fires eastward, he said.

Bad Air, Worse Air

The higher the concentrations of smoke, the more hazardous the air, said Jaime Holt, spokeswoman for the air district.

Most of the Valley on Monday morning except for the Bakersfield area was well above the threshold for level 5, the most severe level, and anyone exercising outdoors — whether running, bicycling, or doing other strenuous activities — is putting their health at risk, Holt said.

Anything above 75 micrograms per cubic feet of air is dangerous for people to spend time outdoors, especially if they are exercising, and the readings in recent days have been four times the 75 microgram threshold, she said.

“I liken it to, are you smoking one cigarette a day, or are you smoking a pack of cigarette a day,” Holt said. “Prolonged extended exposure to higher levels of particulate matter is going to have more of an impact on your health than limited exposure to particulate matter.”

Mask Up

If you do go outside, be sure to wear a mask. Farm workers and others who are employed outside should make sure they are provided an N95 mask or a comparably tight-fitting facial covering, Holt said.

Under CAL/OSHA regulations, employers are required to provide N95 or equivalent face masks to outdoor workers to protect them from wildfire smoke.

Outside, the paper medical masks and cloth masks such as bandannas that many people have worn as a shield against the coronavirus are insufficient as smoke barriers, said Heather Heinks, spokeswoman for the air district.

N95 masks filter more of the noxious materials from the air, but aren't a complete barrier. So the best advice, especially for those with heart or lung problems, is not to go outside, Heinks said — “not even to do a quick walk of the dog.”

But if you don't have an N95 mask and you must go out, then some facial covering is better than none, Holt said.

Air Purifiers Help

Indoor air purifiers provide some relief, although those who don't own one and who are particularly susceptible to smoke are even wearing face masks indoors.

Residents should check their HVAC air filters and change them as necessary, and same for vehicle air filters, Heinks said.

Some residents may even want to consider heading to an indoor shopping mall, where the air is filtered, to get some relief from smoky interiors, she said.

Children and the elderly are particularly at risk from smoky air, said Dr. Anil Ghimire, associate professor of UCSF Fresno and medical director of the Chronic Lung Disease Program at UCSF Fresno.

The tiny particles of smoke enter the lungs and stimulate the immune system, which for young children is still developing, he said. As a result, their immune systems might develop to put them more at risk for an allergic disease such as asthma.

Older people also are at higher risk because they may have a chronic illness such as COPD or heart disease that already affects their ability to breathe easily, Ghimire said. When smoke particulates go from the lungs into the bloodstream, the resulting inflammation further stresses their bodies, he said.

Real-time Air Conditions

Monitoring stations operated by the air district's Real-time Air Advisory Network (RAAN) track the amount of PM 2.5 particulate matter as well as ozone in the Valley, ranking air quality as ranging from green (for good) to purple (for godawful). And we are deep into the purple these days, with PM 2.5 readings topping 300 micrograms per cubic feet of air.

In Oregon, the smoke is so severe that residents are being warned not to vacuum indoors so as not to stir up smoke particles that have settled inside, and not to drive because visibility is so low.

Smartphone users of the air district's RAAN app had some difficulty connecting Monday morning to get current readings. Heinks said the air district's IT personnel were working on the issue. But the weblink MyRAAN was still working Monday.

The air district's website also contains links to wildfire information.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish mentions the poor air quality in the San Joaquin Valley due to wildfire smoke](#)

Calidad del aire en California promedia los niveles de contaminación de China e India

De acuerdo al monitoreo de la calidad del aire realizado por la Organización Mundial de la Salud (OMS), las ciudades más contaminadas del planeta ponderan niveles no saludables y peligrosos, muy similares al aire que se respira en el estado dorado desde agosto.

Univision, Wednesday, Sept. 16, 2020

FRESNO, California.- Los 25 incendios forestales activos que siguen ardiendo en California mantienen la calidad del aire del estado en niveles insalubres y peligrosos. Y es que la gran cantidad de humo es visible desde el espacio y percibida por los 40 millones de californianos.

De acuerdo a los niveles de AQI (índice de calidad del aire) se establecen los niveles con los cuales las autoridades clasifican a las ciudades más contaminadas. En el ranking elaborado por la Organización Mundial de la Salud sobre las ciudades más contaminadas figuran Ghaziabad, en India y Hotan, en China, con un nivel promedio anual de 110 AQI.

Peligroso: 300-500 AQI

Muy insalubre: 201-300 AQI

Insalubre: 151-200 AQI

Insalubre para grupos sensibles: 101-150 AQI

Moderado: 51-100 AQI

Bueno: 0-50 AQU

Este listado de la OMS ubica a ciudades como Los Ángeles, Fresno o Bakersfield con un nivel de AQI inferior a 20, por lo que son consideradas ciudades con aire bueno. Sin embargo, un estudio de la Asociación Americana del Pulmón, publicado en abril pasado determinó que todos los condados del Valle de San Joaquín obtienen nota F en lo que refiere a calidad del aire.

Dicho reporte reveló que las áreas urbanas más contaminadas del país durante el período 2016-2018 fueron Bakersfield, seguida de Fresno-Madera-Hanford, y Visalia; mientras que la ciudad con mayor concentración de ozono en su aire fue Los Ángeles, seguida por Visalia y Bakersfield.

Los incendios que arrasan con California desde agosto pasado mantienen los niveles de calidad del aire por sobre los 150 AQI, considerado 'insalubre'.

Los niveles AQI, en ciudades de China, India y Pakistán sobrepasan los 100 AQU diariamente. Durante el último mes, la Bahía de San Francisco y el Valle Central de California cumplen un mes con niveles de contaminación similares a los vividos en Asia.

La contaminación atmosférica es uno de los problemas del mundo globalizado y consecuencia del cambio climático, aunque la ciencia y la política no se ponen de acuerdo. Un estudio de la OMS, que evaluó los efectos de la contaminación en las personas reveló que 4 millones de personas mueren por causas atribuibles a la mala calidad del aire.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish mentions the current poor air quality the Valley is seeing due to wildfire smoke.](#)

Los niveles insalubres de la calidad del aire en el Valle Central equivalen a fumar 7 cigarrillos diarios

Durante la mañana de este lunes, varios condados del Valle Central de California amanecieron por sobre los 200 AQI (índice calidad de aire), lo que significa que el aire se halla 'muy insalubre'. De acuerdo a un estudio de la Universidad de Berkeley, cuando este alcanza niveles 'muy insalubres' significa que se inhala el humo equivalente a 7 cigarrillos diarios.

Univision 21, Monday, Sept. 14, 2020

FRESNO, California.- Una densa y extensa capa de humo cubre gran parte del cielo de California, cuyas típicas postales de palmeras y surfers son reemplazadas por cenizas y material contaminado. La calidad del aire sigue empeorando y los expertos pronostican que para mitad de semana las condiciones podrían mejorar, sin embargo, la alerta continuará vigente al menos hasta mediados de octubre.

Este lunes, los condados de Fresno y Tulare amanecieron con niveles de calidad de aire por sobre las 200 unidades, lo que implica que este se encuentra 'muy insalubre'. Autoridades recomiendan que residentes suspendan todo tipo de actividad al aire libre.

La exposición prolongada a partículas contaminantes puede causar serios daños a la salud de las personas. Además de asma y dolores de cabeza, existe el riesgo probado que la respiración constante de este humo puede provocar problemas cardiovasculares.

El Distrito de Calidad del Aire en el Valle San Joaquín advierte que los niveles de calidad del aire se hallan en "muy insalubre" o nivel 5 en su nomenclatura.

Peligroso: 300-500 AQI

Muy insalubre: 201-300 AQI

Insalubre: 151-200 AQI

Insalubre para grupos sensibles: 101-150 AQI

Moderado: 51-100 AQI

Bueno: 0-50 AQI

A la fecha se han quemado 3.2 millones acres de vegetación en California, lo que ha convertido esta temporada en una de las más devastadoras de su historia. Actualmente existen 28 incendios activos en el estado dorado, cuyo humo proveniente tanto del sur, del norte y del este está quedando atrapado en el Valle Central de California.

John Klassen del Distrito del Valle del Aire del Valle de San Joaquín comenta que debido a la geografía y topografía del Valle, independiente de cómo corran los vientos, el humo seguirá afectando a la zona central de California.

Principalmente los incendios August complejo Norte que arden en los condados de Butte, Plumas, Mendocino, además del incendio Creek, que arrasa en los condados de Madera y Fresno.

"Definitivamente, esta es una temporada sin precedentes para muchos californianos" dijo Klaseen. Y es que los incendios forestales de este año son los más largos de la historia, por lo que estas condiciones del aire en verano también son anormales.

Un estudio de Berkeley Earth, organización científica sin fines de lucro, reveló que la contaminación del aire mata a más personas en todo el mundo que el SIDA, la malaria o la tuberculosis. En Estados Unidos, la calidad del aire equivale a fumar a 0,4 cigarrillos al día, mientras que en Beijing, China, los residentes inhalan aire contaminado, igual que se fumara 1,6 cigarrillos al día.

"En los días malos, los efectos sobre la salud de la contaminación del aire son comparables al daño causado por fumar tres paquetes por día (60 cigarrillos) por cada hombre, mujer y niño" concluyó el estudio "Contaminación del aire y equivalencia de cigarrillos".

El reporte determinó que el aire en un nivel de 22 equipara a un cigarrillo, por lo que si este alcanza un nivel "muy insalubre" o sobrepasa los 150 AQU, esto equivale a la inhalación del humo de 7 cigarrillos diarios.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish mentions the current poor air quality the Valley is seeing due to wildfire smoke.](#)

Área de Fresno "rodeada de incendios." Se advirtió a los residentes que se queden adentro del aire insoportable

Por Monica Vaughan

Vida en el Valle, Monday, Sept. 14, 2020

Una temporada de incendios sin precedentes significa una contaminación del aire sin precedentes en el Valle de San Joaquín del centro de California, y el alivio no llegará pronto.

Más de 3.2 millones de acres de California se quemaron en la temporada de incendios de 2020, enviando torres ondulantes de humo que llegaron a miles de millas de distancia.

Como resultado, el Valle de San Joaquín central está "batiendo récords de calidad del aire, de mala manera," según Jon Klassen, director de ciencia y planificación de la calidad del aire del Distrito de Control de la Contaminación del Aire del Valle de San Joaquín.

"En una temporada normal de incendios, podemos tener un incendio en Sierra Nevada o un incendio en el sur de California, por lo que si el viento sopla en una dirección determinada, es posible que no tengamos esos impactos," dijo Klassen en una conferencia de prensa en video el lunes.

"Pero debido a lo que estamos viviendo aquí, donde estamos rodeados de incendios, no importa lo que pase con el clima, parece que vamos a seguir teniendo humo en el Valle."

La calidad del aire no es saludable para todos en el Valle el lunes, con un índice de calidad del aire que mide por encima de 150. Cualquier valor por debajo de 50 se considera bueno y seguro. Es particularmente malo en Fresno y Clovis.

Ha alcanzado niveles peligrosos en algunas áreas, incluida Madera.

Alerta de calidad del aire: "Quédese adentro"

Es un riesgo grave para todos, incluso para los adultos sanos.

Los funcionarios de calidad del aire han instado repetidamente a los residentes a permanecer adentro para proteger la salud y prevenir lesiones, incluidas las enfermedades cardiovasculares y respiratorias por exposición al humo de los incendios forestales.

"Entendemos que la gente está enferma y cansada de estar adentro debido a COVID," dijo Jaime Holt del distrito. "Pero ahora mismo es muy importante que sigas dentro. Y es muy importante cambiar el filtro de aire en su (sistema) HVAC."

Cuando se le preguntó sobre el riesgo para las personas que ignoran las advertencias y en cambio salen a correr, por ejemplo, Holt comparó su decisión con fumar un paquete de cigarrillos.

Generalmente, los filtros de aire deben cambiarse cada pocos meses. Holt recomienda cambiar los filtros cada dos o tres semanas debido al denso humo de los incendios forestales.

La calidad del aire no es saludable para todos, con niveles prolongados de partículas que amenazan con desencadenar asma, dañar el desarrollo pulmonar en los niños o causar un ataque cardíaco o un derrame cerebral en los adultos mayores.

No todos pueden quedarse adentro para estar seguros. Los trabajadores agrícolas, jardineros, personal de mantenimiento de piscinas, conserjes al aire libre están en riesgo, especialmente si trabajan físicamente afuera.

En esas situaciones, los empleadores están obligados por ley a reducir la exposición de los empleados a PM 2.5 y proporcionar equipo de protección respiratoria adecuado, como respiradores N95. Se anima a los trabajadores a discutir este requisito de seguridad de Cal/OSHA con su empleador, o contactar a OSHA directamente con una queja.

Puede comunicarse con la Oficina del Distrito de Fresno en DOSHFresno@dir.ca.gov o al (559) 445-5302.