

On California Clean Air Day, here's how you can help each other breathe easier

By Mila Jasper

Fresno Bee, Tuesday, Oct. 6, 2021

California deals with some of the worst air pollution in the United States. In each of the three categories tracked by the American Lung Association — ozone, year-round particle pollution and short-term particle pollution — California cities make up at least six of the top ten most polluted spots.

If those rankings bother you, today is a day to take action: it's the fourth annual California Clean Air Day. The project, organized by the Coalition for Clean Air, is a day meant to encourage personal changes that can help reduce air pollution in the state.

Brian Sheridan, the development engagement director at the Coalition for Clean Air, said the event originated as a response to how Californians were reacting to knowledge of the pollution. Sheridan said, in general, people had one of two reactions: "oh my goodness this is overwhelming, I cannot deal with it" or "I didn't know we have an air pollution issue."

"Neither of those are very good responses," said Sheridan, who is leading the coalition's Clean Air Day event. Here are ways you can productively respond to the air pollution problem:

'IDLING GETS YOU NOWHERE': TAKE A PLEDGE

On the Clean Air Day website, cleanairday.org, you can take one of three pledges outlining changes you can make to help curb air pollution. There's a pledge for individuals, organizations and kids.

The individual pledge includes three categories —switch it out, plant something and reduce vehicle emissions — where you can promise to take specific actions like carpooling, planting a tree or buying local produce.

The pledge for kids offers ideas such as biking to school, doing an air quality experiment and giving a class report on the environment. Kids can also pledge to ask their parents to stop idling in their cars. Sheridan said this is often a problem when parents drive to school early in order to nab the best spot in a pick up line.

"In most cases they don't really realize what they're doing but [idling is] actually releasing harmful carbon dioxide where kids are actually waiting to be picked up," Sheridan said. "We tell them hey, idling gets you nowhere."

Organizations can also pledge to engage employees, customers and clients on the clean air issue by hosting events, sending out messaging and providing incentives for behavior changes.

RIDE TRANSIT FOR FREE

Sacramento Regional Transit is offering free rides across all its systems Wednesday. El Dorado Transit, San Joaquin Regional Transit District, Vacaville City Coach and Yolo County Transportation District will also offer free rides.

HEAD TO A CLEAN AIR DAY EVENT

There's a variety of in-person events you can attend on Clean Air Day, and a full accounting of the events going on across the state is available online. In the Sacramento area, you can attend:

- A tree planting in Carmichael at the La Sierra Community Center. Volunteers need to bring a water bottle, mask, work gloves and shovel, according to the Kiwanis Club of Carmichael, which is organizing the event.

- A UC Davis Clean Air Day event that will also include a tree planting as well as free bike safety checks and a succulent planting demonstration. The event kicks off at 9 a.m. outdoors at 4610 X Street, and all attendees must be vaccinated and wear a mask at the event.
- The Sacramento Transportation Management Association will provide information tables including cookies and handouts with details on how to help clean the air. People can gather between the two buildings located at 1515 S Street before biking to Southside Park as well, according to the event description.
- Habitat For Humanity of Greater Sacramento's Rock the Block will take place Friday and Saturday. Volunteers can sign up to help repair homes and engage in other community projects in South Oak Park. Volunteers can sign up online.

ATTEND EVENTS VIRTUALLY

California Clean Air Day is also hosting a multitude of virtual events, including a book reading and talk with an author of a children's book about fighting for a new electric school bus and a Friday webinar on the California Air Resources Board's 2021 report on hydrogen-fueled electric vehicles.

You can also engage in California Clean Air Day by using the right tags and hashtags on social media. Across all platforms, you can tag @CleanAirDay and hashtag #CleanAirDayCA in your posts, Sheridan said.

And if you're wondering how much impact you, as an individual, can have without more aggressive regulations and policies to help reduce air pollution, Sheridan had this to add:

"When people act, it actually gives our policymakers the confidence to say, oh yeah, maybe I will push for this thing because I see people in my neighborhood who are doing these things," he said. "When people adopt electric vehicles, we get more aggressive on electric vehicle policies."

Air quality alert extended through Thursday

The Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Oct. 5, 2021

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has extended an air quality alert through Thursday because of smoke from the Windy and KNP Complex fires in Tulare County and high pressure and poor dispersion.

The air district is warning residents to remain indoors to reduce their exposure to particulate matter emissions, which can trigger asthma attacks, aggravate chronic bronchitis, and increase the risk of heart attack and stroke.

"Residents experiencing poor air quality due to wildfire smoke should move to a filtered, air-conditioned environment with windows closed. Common cloth and paper masks being used as protection from COVID-19 may not be sufficient protection from wildfire smoke inhalation. For outdoor workers and other individuals that may not be able to remain indoors, state health authorities recommend the use of N95 facemasks as feasible," the air district wrote in a news release.

Go to valleyair.org/wildfires for more information. You can access RAAN to check air quality at any Valley location at myRAAN.com, or the District's "Valley Air" mobile application, and view the EPA AirNow Fire and Smoke map (<https://fire.airnow.gov/>)

Farmworkers continue to work through smoke and unhealthy air in the Central Valley

By Madi Bolanos

Valley Public Radio, Tuesday, Oct. 5, 2021

State guidelines require employers to provide outdoor workers with N95 masks for voluntary use when the air quality index is above 151. On Monday, as AQI was forecast to reach 169 in Fresno County, Carmen Cuautenco continued picking almonds.

She typically picks grapes during the harvest season but with wildfire smoke stunting their growth, she says she's been forced to pivot to almonds. She wore her own mask to protect against COVID-19 and wildfire smoke, but she says her employer never offered her an N95 mask.

Still, she says she doesn't have the option to stay home and not work.

"I can't stay without work because the bills don't wait, the rent doesn't wait," she says in Spanish.

Oscar Garcia also works in the fields near Raisin City. He returned to work last week after two weeks of quarantining due to contracting COVID-19. He says Monday was just another day at work. He says his employer didn't offer any protections or recommendations regarding the smoke and unhealthy air.

"No, they don't say anything," he says in Spanish. "They just say to wear a mask if you're spraying pesticides."

He says fire season has been tough the last two years but he doesn't have the luxury of taking time off.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District expects the poor air quality to continue to impact the region through Thursday.

Kern County under 'unhealthy' air condition for most of the week

By Marco Torrez

KGET.com, Tuesday, Oct. 5, 2021

BAKERSFIELD, Calif. (KGET) — Hazy days are the talk of the town and they aren't going away anytime soon

Bakersfield residents are familiar with the gloomy smog but even so, it still can hurt you.

"Bad air quality days specifically with the wildfire smoke we do know, experts make it quite clear this can pose a health hazard," Michelle Corson from Kern County Public Health said.

According to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District the air in Kern County is rated 153 on the air quality index. That means it's unhealthy and it's going to stay that way until at least Thursday.

But it's important for people to protect themselves.

"Small particle matter that goes into your lungs unfortunately damages your lungs over long periods of time and on very bad air quality days it's like smoking cigarettes," Kian Azimian the assistant medical director at the Memorial Hospital emergency room said.

People with preexisting respiratory issues like asthma, chronic bronchitis and cystic fibrosis need to play it extra safe until things clear up.

"For those folks when the air quality is really bad they need to try their best to be indoors," Azimian said. "Hopefully with either HEPPA filters and also air purifiers are very helpful. Any N95 is very helpful."

Through these smoggy days there has been an increase in the number of people seeking medical help for respiratory issues.

"Whenever you have a big fire or much lower air quality we definitely see a spike," Azimian said. "You see it in kids with asthma and you'll see it with people with the adults that have COPD. Especially with people going outdoors and exerting themselves."

The air quality isn't expected to get better until after Thursday but could get worse later this weekend.

To stay safe do what the health professionals say and stay indoors or if you do go outside limit the time and wear a mask.

GET bus to offer free rides Tuesday due to poor air quality

- The Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Oct. 5, 2021

Golden Empire Transit District will provide free rides Tuesday due to poor air quality — an air quality index of 154. You can ride GET fixed routes and On-Demand Paratransit all day for free.

The GET On-Demand Microtransit is not a free service.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, an AQI over 150 is considered unhealthy and potentially hazardous to the general population.

Smoke-filled skies trigger an air quality alert, but aid firefighters in Tulare County

By Jessica Harrington

ABC 30, Tuesday, October 5, 2021

FRESNO, Calif. (KFSN) -- Call it a double-edged sword. The smoke in the air is creating a health warning for people in the Central Valley, but the hazy skies may also be doing some good for crews battling California wildfires.

"Foothill communities nearest the fires are experiencing the most intense smoke out there," said Heather Heinks, the outreach and communications manager for San Joaquin Valley Air District. Up and down Highway 99, dark, cloudy skies coat much of the Central Valley.

Smoke from the Windy and KNP Complex fires burning in Tulare County has prompted officials in the San Joaquin Valley to issue an Air Quality Alert through Thursday.

Officials say the particulate matter in the air can trigger asthma attacks and can increase the risk of heart attack and stroke.

"It's so small that when you inhale, you breathe it in, you take it into your lungs and then it enters your blood stream through you lungs and it's foreign matter. It shouldn't be in your body." Heinks said.

The smoke from the fire is visible from space. Wednesday, Valley Air officials were warning people in the hardest hit places to stay indoors as much as possible.

While the smoky conditions are creating potential health issues, on the fire front, the hazy skies can actually help.

"When there's an inversion, it greatly reduces fire behavior due to, you know, there's not sun directly on the fuels," said Ariane Sarzotti with the National Parks Service.

Monday, sunlight hit an area of the KNP Complex Fire, creating extreme fire behavior and allowing the fire to make a run north.

While a major weather system could clear the skies in the Central California, it would also fuel the flames firefighters are trying to keep under control.

"It's a double-edged sword when we are hearing that we're going to have more wind on the fire, then, for us, that's going to be clearer air, but, unfortunately, that does increase fire behavior," said Sarzotti.

Valley air experts say they expect to see improvements to the air quality in the coming days and the North Valley, furthest from the fires, will likely see them first.

"Hopefully by Wednesday afternoon and definitely by Thursday, we should see some marked improvement," Heinks said.

While we may see some relief in the coming days, how long it will last will depend on fire behavior and any future weather systems.

For more information on air quality, you can find that here:

You can check the air quality in your zip code or city by [clicking here](#).

You can see how much particulate matter is in the air near you, hour-by-hour, by [clicking here](#).

You can see which fires are impacting air quality in the San Joaquin Valley by [clicking here](#).

You can see current fire and smoke across the state by [clicking here](#).

You can find the smoke outlook for the KNP Complex Fire by [clicking here](#).

You can find the smoke outlook for the Windy Fire by [clicking here](#).

You can find more information including what the air quality is like where you live hour-by-hour and more information on the smoke outlooks by heading to our website ABC30.com.

Air district extends air quality alert due to wildfire smoke in the Valley, warns to stay indoors

By Soreath Hok

Valley Public Radio, Monday, October 4, 2021

An air quality alert first issued last week was extended until Thursday morning due to continuing wildfire smoke. The San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District says there are intense amounts of smoke from the KNP Complex and Windy Fires in Sequoia National Park and nearby forest.

A few days ago, the smoke hung in the atmosphere, but recently, it has settled in the valley like a dense fog. The air district measures air quality levels on a scale of 1 to 5, which indicate levels for ROAR or Real Time Outdoor Activity Risks. Heather Heinks, the outreach and communications manager at the San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District says the level has gone as high as 5 in many areas in recent days, but can change depending on where the plumes of smoke move.

“You can see the windows of opportunity to still have outdoor activities,” she says. She encourages people to monitor air quality conditions by the hour. She recommends people download the Valley Air district’s app or the EPA’s AirNow app on their phones, or go to the air district’s wildfire resource page.

Heinks says weather patterns can cause air quality conditions to shift. Rain, moisture and most of all, wind can help to clear out the smoke that’s trapped in the valley.

“As we move through the next few days we anticipate the Central Valley region to have a heavy influence of particulate matter pollution,” she says.

At level 5, it’s recommended that everyone stays indoors. If you have to be outdoors, it’s recommended you wear a fitted N95 mask to best filter out the pollution. Heinks says being outdoors is dangerous.

“And so you walk outside to a haze, you can smell it. If you’re smelling it, that definitely means you’re breathing in fine particle pollution,” she says.

Prolonged exposure to PM 2.5, or microscopic levels of particulate matter can lead to respiratory illnesses. Those most at risk are people with heart or lung disease, older adults and children.

Our investigation, 'Dangerous Air' prompts lawmaker calls for worker protections, fire prevention investments

By Scott Rodd

CapRadio, Monday, October 4, 2021

State and federal lawmakers plan to introduce legislation and hold at least one oversight hearing in response to Dangerous Air, an investigation from the California Newsroom, which showed smoke from western wildfires is choking vast swaths of the country, from Los Angeles to Boston.

“This investigation confirms what we’ve known for years: as wildfires become more frequent due to climate change, the health of our communities will suffer,” said Rep. Ro Khanna (D-San Jose), who chairs the U.S. House Oversight Subcommittee on Environment, in an emailed statement. “I will have a hearing on wildfires, smoke pollution, and commercial logging practices that may be making the problem worse. This is a matter of public health, environmental justice, and Congress has no option but to act.”

The investigation analyzed federal satellite imagery collected by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Carried out in partnership with Stanford University's Environmental Change and Human Outcomes Lab, it revealed a startling increase in the number of days residents were breathing smoke in cities across America.

In San Jose, which Khanna represents, residents breathed wildfire smoke an average of 45 days a year between 2016 and 2020, the investigation found, a 400% increase from the period between 2009 to 2013.

"We are living and breathing the climate crisis," tweeted Congressman Jason Crow (D- Colorado). He noted our investigation showed his suburban Denver district was "seeing an average of 2 additional weeks of wildfire smoke per year — 14 more days of increased risk for asthma, respiratory disease, and premature births."

Lawmakers from both parties said the investigation provided further evidence for a comprehensive government response. They advocated for better forest management, including prescribed burns, which experts say are crucial to stemming serious wildfires that send dangerous smoke into the skies. And there are proposals for the immediate term — including stronger protections for workers and the creation of smoke shelters, where people with elevated health risks can escape the dangerous air.

In California, where residents are most impacted, Assemblywoman Luz Rivas, a Democrat from Los Angeles who chairs the Assembly Natural Resources Committee, said she plans to introduce a legislative package to address wildfire smoke impacts.

One potential area of focus would be increasing protections for outdoor workers and standardizing when school children are not let out for recess to avoid being exposed to dangerous air. "A lot of my constituents are worried about their children and long-term health effects," she said.

Rivas' proposal is one of many that seeks to minimize the immediate health impacts of widespread smoke, recognizing it will take many years — and colossal amounts of money — to address the root causes.

Forest Management and Climate Change

Forests across the western U.S. are overgrown, filled with bone-dry vegetation that fuel catastrophic fires. The Golden State saw its most active wildfire season in history last year, with 4.3 million acres burned, nearly 10,500 structures damaged or destroyed and 33 deaths. Over 2 million acres have burned so far this year.

Both Democrats and Republicans said the investigation showed more aggressive forest management is needed.

"The short and long term [solutions] come down to management of the lands where the fire starts," said Rep. Doug LaMalfa, a Republican whose district in rural Northern California includes areas where residents breathe smoke three months a year.

He says thinning forestlands has gotten harder due to increased regulations. Projects can take years due to lengthy environmental reviews and the bureaucratic approval process.

Forest management does not mean "clear cutting" or removing all trees, LaMalfa said, adding that he and other lawmakers have been advocating for a variety of targeted management techniques, including forest thinning and prescribed burning. The California Legislature passed bills this year to change liability laws and create a \$20 million insurance liability fund to encourage more prescribed burns.

Low- and moderate-intensity fire is a natural part of the forest ecosystem. But a century of aggressive forest suppression has snuffed out these so-called "good fires," leading to a dangerous buildup of undergrowth. Fire scientists say state and federal governments need to substantially increase their forest management efforts.

For the government's part, the ambition is there, but execution still lags. Last August, California entered into an agreement with the U.S. Forest Service to each perform fire prevention work on 500,000 acres annually in the state by 2025. The Forest Service remains well short of that goal, treating about 120,000

acres in the last year. Cal Fire was unable to provide up-to-date numbers on its progress towards the target.

Democrats also advocate for more aggressive action on climate change.

The Build Back Better Act — a \$3.5 trillion, 2,000-plus page bill that captures many of President Biden's policy priorities — includes several ambitious climate change proposals.

The legislation, currently being negotiated in Congress, includes a \$150 billion program that would pay utility companies to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. It's unclear whether that provision will make it into the final legislation, however, as it has received pushback from Sen. Joe Manchin, a centrist Democrat whose vote is seen as crucial.

Fire scientists say climate change has set the stage for wildfires to burn out of control in recent years. LaMalfa, echoing some fellow Republicans, says prioritizing land management is "a lot better than this continued fight over what we're going to [do about] climate change." Fire and climate experts argue a long-term plan for addressing climate change is essential for curbing wildfires, in addition to forest management.

Protecting Essential Workers

State lawmakers in California passed legislation this year to protect agricultural workers from the increasing dangers of wildfire smoke. And they're looking to build on it next session.

Assembly Bill 73, which Gov. Gavin Newsom signed last week, ensures that the state's stockpile of N95 masks is available to farm workers during severe smoke events. It also requires employers to provide workers with training in the language they speak on the dangers posed by wildfire smoke.

Democratic Assemblyman Robert Rivas, who represents nearly 100,000 farmworkers, authored the bill to "ensure that we're doing all we can to protect the health and safety of such a vulnerable population of workers."

Rivas says employers were already required to provide workers with masks, but struggled to acquire adequate PPE inventory.

Next session, Rivas may revive proposed requirements left out of the final bill. For example, an early version would have created "strike teams" deployed by the state to ensure employer compliance.

Congressman Jared Huffman, a Democratic member of the U.S. House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis, said it was time to start making policies for "smoke refugees" — for example, federally funded air shelters for residents who need a safe place to breathe.

"Almost like evacuation centers [on] one of these days where the air is just too unhealthy to breathe," said Huffman, whose sprawling Northern California district runs from the Golden Gate Bridge to the Oregon border. "At least people that have fragile conditions, who maybe can't afford air conditioning or don't have things in their home to protect them, can go to these places and have quality air to breathe."

Sen. Alex Padilla (D-CA), along with several other Democrats, introduced a bill this year that would allow the president to declare a "smoke emergency. The federal government could then help communities establish smoke shelters and relocate vulnerable populations.

Better Data, Public Health Tracking

State and federal lawmakers also said they need reliable and comprehensive data in order to take action.

"Data in this area is absolutely critical [to] understanding the detrimental health impacts from wildfire smoke," said Assemblyman Rivas.

The California Newsroom's investigation relied on satellite images of smoke plumes rather than data on air quality itself, because air monitoring stations maintained by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency are spread inconsistently across the country, with many gaps in rural and urban areas most impacted by wildfire smoke.

At the federal level, Senate Democrats introduced the “Smoke Planning and Research Act,” which would set aside \$20 million in research funding for the EPA to study the health impacts of smoke and create a grant program to fund research efforts at the local level.

This year, the California Legislature passed Assembly Bill 619, which requires the state Department of Public Health to develop safety guidelines for counties to implement during dangerous air quality days. The bill is on Newsom’s desk.