

Heat, bad air to stick around

It's fall -- and 100 degrees outside

By Audrey Cooper, Record Staff Writer, September 24, 2002

The first full day of autumn Monday didn't break summer's stranglehold on San Joaquin County.

High temperatures across the county fell short of breaking records but were still well above normal, the National Weather Service reported.

Over the weekend, the mercury climbed to just 1 or 2 degrees below the century mark. On Monday, the weather service said, the high in Stockton was 100. AccuWeather reported a high of 101. The record for the date, set in 1939, was 104.

Normal high temperatures are a more comfortable 86 degrees, said Karl Swanberg, a forecaster with the National Weather Service.

That hot weather kept air conditioners humming Monday and smog levels unhealthily high.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District called a Spare the Air Day on Monday, because levels of air pollution were expected to be unhealthy for children and sensitive adults, including those with asthma or other breathing problems.

Air quality worsens on hot days, because sunlight speeds the formation of ground-level ozone, commonly referred to as smog. Usually, the hottest days also are plagued with bad pollution levels.

A Spare the Air Day also has been called for today, and there likely will be additional Spare the Air Days on Wednesday and possibly Thursday and Friday. Today's is the 28th air alert called this summer.

"The weather is a big factor, but the real kicker is when you start off the week with a bad buildup of commute pollution. It doesn't tend to get better if you start off the week in a bad situation," air district spokeswoman Josette Merced Bello said.

Despite the hot weather and bad air, hospital officials said Monday that they saw the usual number of patients suffering from heat-related illnesses.

National Weather Service forecasters say more-autumnal weather may hit Stockton by the end of the week. During the workweek, the high temperatures are predicted to stay in the 90s, but they may cool to the 80s this weekend.

Stockton wasn't the only city sweltering Monday. Sacramento suffered its fifth day in a row with temperatures above 100 degrees. Downtown Sacramento has experienced eight days this month with temperatures that high, breaking the previous record of seven days, set in 1983.

Heat wave persists as autumn arrives

By SUSAN HERENDEEN, Modesto Bee, September 24, 2002

Autumn began Monday, but a summer heat wave is expected to keep temperatures in the high 90s for a few more days, adding to the list of hotter-than-normal days this year.

The temperature reached 98 degrees at 5 p.m. at Modesto Airport, and the Modesto Irrigation District reported a high of 99 degrees at its downtown station. It was the hottest Sept. 23 recorded since 1943, when Modesto sizzled at 100 degrees, and 4 degrees below the record high of 103 in 1939.

Merced, Manteca and Los Banos all recorded highs of 100 degrees Monday, while Stockton did them one better by posting a high of 101, according to the National Weather Service.

Weather forecasters expect temperatures to remain in the high 90s today and Wednesday, and then dip into the low 90s Thursday.

That's far below the peak of 110 degrees on July 10, but the warm weather comes on the heels of a summer that was hotter than usual in the Northern San Joaquin Valley and across the nation.

"If this were July, no one would even bat an eye," said Mike Smith, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Sacramento.

Hot and sunny days are a boon to business owners in the Sierra and the foothills, because it brings tourists who want to enjoy the start of the hunting season or have one last summer fling.

"The weekend was great," said Tim Colvin, the regional manager for Forever Resorts, which operates the Lake Don Pedro and Moccasin Point marinas.

But the heat got a mixed reaction from people on the streets of downtown Modesto.

Brian Blair, a salesman from Riverbank, said he is glad to get a few more hot days.

"I don't think it's normal, but I love it," he said.

Katie Copobianco, a sophomore at Modesto High School, said it's too hot to be stuck in a school that doesn't have air conditioning in all of its classrooms.

"I almost fell asleep in sixth period," she said.

Several government agencies issue warnings when the mercury shoots up. The following are in effect now:

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District declared this summer's 25th Spare the Air day Monday; officials said the designation will continue today. People should drive less and postpone lawn mowing and painting, and limit their outdoor activities while the designation is in effect.

The city of Modesto is asking residents to conserve water, because demand peaks when it gets hot. People should limit their showers to only five minutes, run full laundry and dishwasher loads, and use outdoor sprinklers for only 10 minutes every other day.

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection has banned agricultural burning until fire season ends in late October. People should take precautions by clearing the ground for 30 feet around their homes and keeping tree branches at least 10 feet away.

Hot all over

Nationwide, the summer of 2002 was the third-hottest on record, according to the National Climatic Data Center in Asheville, N.C. Only 1936 and 1934 were hotter.

In Modesto, the monthly temperature was 1.5 degrees higher than average in June, 1.2 degrees higher than average in July, 1 degree lower than average in August and 2 degrees higher than average so far in September.

There were 13 days when the temperature eclipsed 100 degrees after summer began June 21 and there were two more days hotter than 100 degrees in early June.

The National Climatic Data Center recently warned of drought conditions in 45 percent of the nation, but that's par for the course in Modesto, which gets only about 12 inches of rain a year, mostly in the winter.

Roger Duncan, a farm adviser with the University of California Cooperative Extension in Stanislaus County, said growers worried when the temperature shot up to 101 degrees or more for five straight days in July.

The heat didn't hurt, though, and growers ended up with high yields of quality produce.

"This has been a great summer," Duncan said. "Overall, the weather has been very cooperative."

Polluted parks

Sequoia-Kings Canyon ranks No. 4 on list of the nation's top five

By Staff, wire reports, Visalia Times-Delta, September 24, 2002

The air of Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Parks is worse than the air in most of the nation's metropolitan areas, according to a survey released Monday.

The Great Smoky Mountains is the nation's most polluted national park, with air quality rivaling that of Los Angeles.

The survey was released the same day a National Park Service study found air quality has improved or at least stayed the same in more than half of 32 monitored parks since 1990.

"In most parks, air quality exceeds standards set by the Environmental Protection Agency to protect public health and welfare," Park Service Director Fran Mainella said in a statement. "Our findings also show that some parks occasionally experience pristine air quality conditions, unaffected by air pollution."

The National Parks Conservation Association said that wasn't good enough.

"Clean air in our parks shouldn't be an occasion, it should be a condition," Southeast regional director Don Barger said.

Pollutants considered

Using park service data, the association and two other environmental groups, Appalachian Voices and Our Children's Earth, rated the Great Smoky Mountains as the most polluted park. The NPCA surveyed 10 national parks over 11 years and ranked the worst five in terms of air pollution. The study looked at ozone pollution, haze of visibility, and acid precipitation.

Sequoia-Kings

Sequoia-Kings Canyon was ranked the fourth-worst overall, rating worse in terms of average annual ozone exposure in hourly parts per billion than the cities of Charlotte, N.C., Atlanta, Knoxville, Tenn., Washington, D.C., New York, Houston and Chicago.

"There's no surprises [in the report]," Sequoia-Kings Canyon spokeswoman Kris Fister said.

"These numbers are nothing new. Our air comes from the same place where your air comes from."

Kelly Malay, a spokeswoman with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, said the majority of the air pollution in Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Parks comes from the Valley, one of the dirtiest air basins in the nation. The parks also suffer from transport pollution from the Sacramento and Bay area air basins.

Effects

Fister said ozone pollution can be damaging to Jeffrey pines, black oaks and sequoia seedlings, although it does not seem to affect mature sequoias.

Ozone can irritate lungs, reduce resistance to infection and aggravate conditions such as asthma, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

"We are concerned about it for a number of reasons," Fister said. "We're concerned about the effect on our employees and our visitors, and the respiratory systems of animals. We are very concerned about this. It's a problem that goes beyond our borders and it needs to be addressed."

Great Smokey Mountains, on the Tennessee-North Carolina line, is the nation's most popular park with more than 9 million visitors a year. Park spokesman Bob Miller noted that efforts by area utilities are being made to cut down on pollution.

Ozone levels

Ozone levels in the Appalachian park violated federal health standards more than 175 times since 1998, rivaling air quality in Los Angeles, threatening the health of hikers and damaging 30 species of plants, the environmental groups said.

Sequoia-Kings Canyon exceeded federal ozone levels for an eight-hour period 61 times in the summer of 2001, according to the NCPA report.

In comparison, the San Joaquin Valley, unofficially, exceeded federal ozone levels for an eight-hour period 109 times in 2001 and has exceed those levels 108 times so far in 2002.

Those numbers are still subject to change, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Shenandoah National Park in Virginia was rated the second-most polluted park, followed by Mammoth Cave National Park in Kentucky. Acadia National Park in Maine was rated the fifth most polluted.

"America's national parks have some of the dirtiest air in the country," NCPA spokeswoman Michelle Jesperson said. "People look to our parks as areas of pristine habitats and places they would expect the air to be cleaner than staying in the city. When you have days deemed unhealthy to go and hike and exercise out doors, that's significantly problematic." Times-Delta editor Kevin McCusker and Associated Press reporter Duncan Mansfield contributed to this report

Park smog joins best of worst

By Mark Grossi, The Fresno Bee, *September 24, 2002*

With chronic smog problems worse than many cities in America, Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Parks landed Monday among the five worst national parks for air pollution.

The National Parks Conservation Association, a long-established advocacy group, listed the two adjoining Central California parks as the fourth-worst-polluted park site in the country.

National Park Service officials said they were not surprised Sequoia-Kings Canyon was the only Western site in the top five. The parks, east of Fresno, are downwind of the San Joaquin Valley, the second-worst polluted air basin in the country.

"Last year, we had 61 days over the health standard for ozone," said Annie Esperanza, air resources specialist at Sequoia-Kings Canyon. "The nearest park to us for ozone violations was Joshua Tree [in Southern California], which had only 14. By far, we're the worst in the West."

The national rankings, contained in the association's report called "Code Red: America's Five Most Polluted National Parks," named Great Smokey Mountains National Park the worst because of ozone, haze and acid rain. The park, spread between Tennessee and North Carolina, has 9 million visitors annually.

The other three parks in the top five are: Shenandoah in Virginia, Mammoth Cave in Kentucky and Acadia National Park in Maine. All have problems with acid rain and haze.

Michelle Jesperson, associate regional director of the parks conservation group, said the report is an answer to the Bush administration's Clean Skies Initiative, which environmentalists consider a rollback of the Clean Air Act. Environmentalists believe the Clean Air Act should be enforced.

The Bush initiative was introduced this year, but no action has been taken.

"A lot of people assume national parks are protected," she said. "It's shocking that supposedly pristine places have pollution levels as bad as many urban places."

Though haze is a problem in Sequoia-Kings Canyon, ozone is the area's chief headache.

Sequoia and Kings Canyon have had more violations of the eight-hour ozone standard this year than Sacramento, San Diego and San Francisco combined. By the end of August, the two parks had 71 violations. The San Joaquin Valley leads the nation with 108.

Joshua Tree National Park, which is downwind from the Los Angeles area, has 34 ozone violations this year.

Yosemite National Park to the north of Sequoia-Kings Canyon ranks third-worst for ozone.

Ozone or smog is a corrosive gas that damages human lungs. It also damages and weakens plant life, Esperanza said. Jeffrey pine trees, for instance, show a yellow mottling in the needles from ozone pollution.

To protect the public, Sequoia-Kings Canyon officials post daily information about air quality in visitor centers.

"We have to get this issue on everybody's radar," she said. "People have to know it's a problem."

Air district misses deadline

By Mike Jensen, Merced Sun-Star, September 24, 2002

The federal Environmental Protection Agency has made it official.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has failed to submit an air clean-up plan by a May 31 deadline.

The plan was expected to show how the Valley will meet federal Clean Air Act requirements by 2005.

The EPA's finding starts a clock for when the Central Valley could face federal sanctions, including the loss of about \$2 billion in highway funds.

If the district now fails to submit a clean-up plan by March 2004, the EPA could increase the amount of air pollution off-sets required of new businesses moving into the Valley.

New businesses typically meet air pollution offset requirements by purchasing air credits from other businesses. The credits are awarded to businesses doing more than what is required to reduce air pollution.

If the air district still has not submitted a plan by September 2004, the EPA could step in and go to work on a federal air plan and hold back the highway funds, according to EPA spokeswoman Lisa Fasano.

Josette Merced Bello, the spokeswoman for the Valley air district, said Monday that the district has yet to determine how it will meet the clean air requirements.

Dave Mitchell, an air district senior planner, said Monday that the district expects to submit a new plan by December 2003.

Meanwhile, the district is poised to ask that the EPA declare the Valley in "extreme" non-compliance with provisions of the federal Clean Air Act. The valley is now in "severe" non-compliance.

Only one other air basin in the nation — Los Angeles — is in "extreme" non-compliance, and the Valley air district would be the first to invite the "extreme" non-compliance declaration.

Such a reclassification would have the effect of stopping the clock on sanctions until the air district can find a way to meet the Clean Air Act standards in 2010.

By Sept. 18, 2003, the air district plans to ask the EPA to reclassify the air quality, and the EPA has said it will likely grant the request.

The "extreme" rating will force about 150 Valley businesses — and an unknown number of farmers — to comply with air pollution regulations.

The EPA is still figuring out exactly which farm equipment and pollution sources will be regulated, Fasano said. "As of right now, we know larger, older diesel pump engines will come into it," she said.

Businesses currently emitting 25 tons or more of nitrogen oxide pollution each year must obtain a federal "Title 5 permit." Under the extreme rating, those businesses and farmers emitting 10 tons per year will also have to obtain permits, each costing about \$5,000.

With the original May 31 air plan deadline, the air district was expected to show how it would reduce valley ozone pollution by 300 tons per day by 2005.

The air district was unable to do so and didn't submit the plan. In June, the air district said it would ask for the downgrade in air quality to "extreme."

According to Bello, the air district has so far identified about 180 tons of pollution that will be reduced through the district's efforts and with new state and federal requirements on vehicle engines, fuels and consumer products.

Among the new regulations expected to help the air district is the Smog Check II bill approved by the legislature in August. It would force Bay Area vehicles to undergo the same vehicle emissions testing as other California motorists.

It would reduce the Valley's air pollution by about 16 tons per day, according to Bello.

But Gov. Gray Davis has not indicated if he'll sign the bill.

And even if he signs it, an 11th-hour amendment would require the Yolo-Solano and Sacramento air management districts to drop a lawsuit against the EPA.

The suit challenges the EPA's approval of the Bay Area "Motor Vehicle Emissions Budget," and part of the suit—but not all of it—asks that Smog Check II be implemented in the Bay Area.

An attorney with the Sacramento air district had previously said she didn't know if the suit would be dropped even if Davis signed the bill, and on Monday, Sacramento air district spokesman Kerry Shearer said, "There is no new news" about the status of the suit.

Yolo-Solano apparently would abandon the suit if the governor signs the bill. Mat Ehrhardt, assistant air pollution control officer with that air district, said Friday, "When and if that's signed, as far as the district's concerned, that will end the suit."

The Valley air district also has started programs to reduce emissions by replacing irrigation pumps and other heavy polluting engines.

As part of those efforts, the air district has helped Valley residents pay the cost of replacing almost 2,400 gasoline lawn mowers with electric ones.

The district has helped pay the cost of replacing about 300 mowers in Merced County. Last week, however, Black and Decker, Inc., announced a recall of some mowers so that a blade control device could be replaced.

Those who think they have a defective electric mower can call (866) 229-5570.

According to the air district's Bello, the mowers are expected to reduce air pollution by 23.2 tons over their five-year lifetime.

That averages out to about a 0.013 ton per day reduction in air pollution.

Bello said there should be little impact in air quality from the recall.

"In terms of air quality, the impact would be minimal," she said.

Letter to the editor, Bakersfield Californian, September 24, 2002

It's too good to be true

According to a recent article posted in *The Californian*, the state Air Resources Board has determined that gas cans stowed in garages throughout the state are a source of air pollution. Using the air quality board's own figures, 87 tons of emissions per day are being produced from 12 million gas cans.

A little bit of simple math applied and we find that each can is producing 68.9 pounds of pollutant per day. If a gallon of gas weighs roughly seven pounds and the average gas can holds five gallons, then it stands to reason that each container holds 35 pounds of gas. Considering the pollutant is a vapor or unburned gasoline this would mean that each can of gas is producing nearly double its own weight in fuel every day.

This is too good to be true. All I have to do is go out to my garage and design a vapor recovery system (kind of like Grandpa's still) attach it to my gas can, and I'll never have to pay for gas again! In fact, this could be the solution to a myriad of world problems. No more offshore drilling, no more dependency on foreign oil; the possibilities are endless. Finally, a government organization has utilized its resources to benefit the public. I am truly impressed.

C. DAVID KOBLE, Bakersfield

Letter to the editor, Modesto Bee, September 24, 2002

Time to catch up

In Modesto, we are way behind in our law enforcement efforts, our street repairs, our school construction, our hospital care and several other areas.

We need to catch up on all of these problems. It is way past time that the people of Modesto have what they should have. We have a long way to go, and it can be done with some foresight. Yes, we can pay a salary to a mayor. By doing so, it will bring to us persons who will have a good education, and past experience in doing what needs to be done to get our city back on track.

To excel, we need to stop building homes. That is all our city leaders worry about. We need to take care of our existing problems first. Modesto needs industry **to help keep our people here and working in our area, instead of being forced to make long commutes as many do, because we do not offer employment in our area. That would do a lot to ease air pollution as well as traffic congestion.**

We need high-tech employment as well as main line employment. Let's face the fact that electronics are where the future lies. Our City Council should take care of the problems they have created before letting more problems come into being.

CHARLES E. EVERS III

Modesto