

Crews contain Fresno junkpile blaze

Fire engines will be at the site for the next few weeks to extinguish hot spots.

By Jennifer Fitzenberger

The Fresno Bee

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Acrid smoke no longer billows from the Archie Crippen Excavation junk fire in southwest Fresno, officials said Tuesday.

Firefighters fully contained the 26-day-old fire about 11 a.m., bringing sighs of relief from city, county, state and federal officials.

"It was a team effort," said Mayor Alan Autry, dwarfed by a towering pile of charred rubble. "They did one heck of a job in difficult circumstances to get this fire under control."

Officials pledged to determine how to prevent such a fire from happening again. The mayor's task force on the fire, which will meet tonight for the first time, will report findings to the Fresno City Council.

"We still have much work ahead to do," said Council Member Cynthia Sterling, who will lead the task force.

The 25-foot-tall pile of wood, concrete, carpet, mattresses, automobile parts and other debris ignited Jan. 11 by spontaneous combustion. The firefighting effort cost about \$2.5 million.

The City Council on Tuesday adopted a resolution to extend the local emergency declared last month. It will revisit the issue in two weeks.

Dan Hobbs, city manager, said the action ensures there is no question among state and federal officials that Fresno considers the fire an emergency situation and, therefore, remains eligible for state and federal assistance and reimbursement.

Also, city officials say the action gives the city manager power to close roads in the area or open and close buildings controlled by the city, as well as the authority to obtain any supplies or equipment needed for the emergency.

Though the fire is contained, flareups still are possible, interim Fire Chief Joel Aranaz said. "Can we say the fire is definitely out? No, we can't. We may run into some hot spots still," he said.

Fire engines will be on site for the next few weeks to douse hot spots. About 20 workers will be there each day, down from 80 per day during the fire's peak.

Firefighters soon will break the pile into smaller chunks, and workers will build access roads through the 4.8-acre site.

The state Integrated Waste Management Board will test the rubble to decide whether it is suitable for a landfill.

It's unclear how long the pile will remain on Nielsen Avenue west of Marks Avenue or how it will be removed.

"Right now, the goal is to find out what is here," said Michelle Rogow, on-scene coordinator for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Rogow said workers will monitor the pile for carbon monoxide, which might indicate combustion.

Firefighters found several tanks buried in the rubble, none of which contained hazardous materials.

Rogow said an oil-like substance found in one of the tanks was determined to be water.

Small efforts will make a big difference in our air quality

Letter to the Editor, Fresno Bee

By Rick Dumas

Clovis

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As I was driving by the Baz Allergy Center recently, I noticed that the air was declared "unhealthy" yet again. I can't help but wonder if there is ever a healthy time to be in the San Joaquin Valley.

We have unique circumstances in this Valley and complicated variants that contribute to our pollution problems, beginning with the fact that because we live in a great basin, our air has difficulty circulating, thus causing it to be stagnant and dirty. Also, we have densely populated areas that rely heavily on the automobile.

There are numerous ways in which we could cut back on smog-causing emissions, starting by eliminating all drive-through services in our community. What, get rid of drive-throughs? Yep. I realize having to get out of our SUVs to retrieve our super-sized fast-food meal is a difficult and painful notion to ponder, but I really think this could be a great start. And we could all use the exercise, right?

I have another revolutionary idea: How about going for walks in our own neighborhoods, instead of driving to the gym at rush hour to walk on the

treadmill? These small modifications in our life can actually have a significant long-term impact in the quality of our air. Let's get moving.

A new air board

Letter to the Editor, Fresno Bee

By Kevin Frye

Fresno

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Our Valley air board comprises 11 locally elected officials. These locally elected officials, acting as policy makers, ensure that the implementation of state and federal air pollution mandates in the Valley is tailored to local conditions and is responsive to local needs.

This is the mandated intent of the current air board. These words can mean almost anything to a politician; they can change day-to-day depending upon whom they are serving. Although, I suspect there are dedicated individuals on this board, they may not be able to effectively get us to the next level -- breathable air.

I believe that the board should not contain politicians who are under a variety of external pressures to deliver for special interests. We have a crisis on our doorstep and need a board that can impose the tougher restrictions required without fear of reprisal from the special interests that support their campaigns and livelihoods.

The current board members should move themselves to an advisory role and a highly independent board of concerned and informed citizenry should be installed at once.