

Unhealthy air quality expected to continue

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Air quality officials are warning that unusually poor air quality could continue in the valley for the next week due to warm, stagnant weather. Air is usually good in March. The air quality index in Bakersfield is predicted to reach 102 today, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, a level considered unhealthy for sensitive groups. Children, the elderly, and anyone with breathing problems should avoid strenuous outdoor activity.

Valley air quality usually runs in the "good" range in March, with AQI readings normally below 100. But a high-pressure system and stagnant winds have raised the temperature and pollution levels.

Bakersfield's peak air quality was expected to reach 106 on Wednesday.

Fresno was predicted to be worse, reaching 124 on Wednesday and 110 today.

Forecasters say a change in the weather will improve conditions by the middle of next week.

Temperatures are expected to reach a high of 87 and a low of 50 in Bakersfield today.

Warm weather means dirty air

Some people may want to limit outdoor activities

By Staff reports

The Visalia Times-Delta

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Two weeks of temperatures reaching into the 80s have left the Valley with poor air quality, and it's expected to continue through early next week, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said Wednesday.

When air quality is forecast to be unhealthy for sensitive groups, then children, the elderly, people with existing lung conditions and adults who exercise outdoors should modify their activities to reduce outdoor exertion levels.

"We normally have air quality in the good to moderate range this time of year," said Steve Shaw, an air quality project planner with the Valley Air District's air quality analysis section. "But the stagnant conditions over this two-week period have lead to higher-than-expected concentrations of ammonia nitrate, carbon and other small particles."

Conditions are expected to get better next week, possibly as early as Sunday.

"It looks like there is going to be a cold front coming through on Sunday, which might be able to blow some of this stagnant air out of here," said David Spector, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Hanford.

Temperatures are expected to be in the mid-80s again today, cooler a couple of degrees on Friday and then warm up again on Saturday before cooling on Sunday. Once Sunday hits, the temperature should fall about two to three degrees each day through the middle of next week, Spector said.

That will mean highs in the upper 60s to mid-70s by the middle of next week.

He said highs in the upper 60s are average for this time of year.

Particulate matter

Since March 5, air quality has been deteriorating in the Valley. Monitoring stations in these areas have recorded unusually high levels of particulate matter that is 2.5 microns and smaller.

A micron is a millionth of a meter. When inhaled, PM2.5 can trigger asthma flares and heart attacks, lead to lung ailments such as bronchitis and exacerbate existing lung conditions.

Air pollution levels considered unhealthy for sensitive groups have been recorded in Fresno, Visalia and Bakersfield on several days since March 5.

Air quality index

Air quality is reported as a number on the Air Quality Index, whereby 0 to 50 is good; 51 to 100 is moderate; 101 to 150 is unhealthy for sensitive groups; 151 to 200 is unhealthy and 200 or higher is very unhealthy. The worst air quality for Visalia so far this year was 112 on Saturday.

How to help

Valley residents can help reduce and control air pollution by:

- ? Avoiding unnecessary vehicle use, including personal automobiles, watercraft and off-road vehicles
- ? If you have to drive, drive smart by accelerating gradually
- ? Use cruise control on the highway
- ? Obey the speed limit
- ? Combine errands into one trip
- ? Keep your car tuned and support the Smog Check Program
- ? Avoid topping off at the gas pump
- ? Take the train for personal and business trips out of the area
- ? Delay mowing the lawn
- ? It's OK to barbecue, but don't use lighter fluid.

Source: San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District

Valley's bad air defies cleanup attempts

Physicist addresses stubborn problem, need for a custom-made fix.

By Mark Grossi
The Fresno Bee
March 18, 2004

An authority who studies air quality around the globe says the San Joaquin Valley's murky air needs a custom-made fix because current cleanup tactics are not working.

Physicist Thomas Cahill, who discovered dangerous air-quality problems that eluded federal officials at ground zero after the World Trade Center collapse, said Wednesday the Valley is a bit of a mystery.

While smog or ozone pollution in the Los Angeles area has dropped dramatically in the past 12 years, the Valley has made only modest gains. For eight-hour measurements of ozone levels, the Valley violates the standard more often than any other place in the country.

"Clearly, we're doing something wrong," Cahill said. "Science is not up to explaining this."

Cahill, a University of California at Davis professor and innovator in air-quality investigation, spoke in Fresno's Saroyan Theatre at the Valley Town Hall. He is known internationally for helping develop a network of air pollution laboratories. Cahill's work dates back to the early 1970s when he pushed the inclusion of catalytic converters on vehicles. He later investigated air problems in Owens Valley as well as national parks.

He described the Valley as different from Los Angeles and any other area of the country. The massive, inland bowl-shaped area stretches from Stockton to Bakersfield, trapping pollutants in stagnant weather patterns.

The Valley has never achieved federal standards for ozone or smog. As the area missed federal deadlines in the past three years, new laws, voluntary cleanup efforts and numerous lawsuits blossomed.

Cahill contends the federal Clean Air Act's rules, deadlines and interpretations of science do not fit. The Valley needs to challenge the one-size-fits-all thinking.

"The Central Valley is going to have to take charge of its own destiny," he said.

He discussed the dangers in air pollution, particularly fine specks of dust, soot, ash or chemicals. Research shows a connection between the tiny particles and heart problems.

Wherever communities have a lot of particle pollution, the death rate is higher, he said.

"The fine particles remain in the lungs, enter the bloodstream and move to the heart," Cahill said. "The more dirt you have, the more death you get."

The Valley is among the worst places in the country for particle pollution, which comes from unpaved roads, fireplaces, construction, agriculture and chemicals combining in the atmosphere.

Ozone, a corrosive summertime gas, also is a danger. Ozone, or smog, ages people, Cahill said.

"A single ozone molecule will kill the cells it hits," he said. "It ages your eyes, skin, lungs -- anything it touches."

The state should focus on getting gross-polluting cars and trucks repaired or off the road, he said.

Cahill also suggested that the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District work closer with surrounding air districts. An annual research symposium should be planned.

"We do not have an adequate understanding of the problems," he said. "The Valley is as different from Los Angeles as Los Angeles is from Chicago."

Researchers target asthma and dirty air

Four universities will study the toll pollution takes in Riverside and elsewhere.

Wednesday, March 17, 2004

By DAVID DANIELSKI

The Press-Enterprise [published in Riverside, serving Riverside and San Bernardino counties]

Air-pollution scientists at four universities will embark on research this month that they hope will unravel air pollution's role in an asthma epidemic affecting tens of thousands of Inland children.

They will enlist Riverside children to carry air samplers in backpacks.

They will examine the health consequences faced by kids who live near freeways, and they will track air pollution and hospitalizations of newborns and young children.

The work, announced Tuesday, is expected to focus on tail-pipe emissions from cars and trucks, the cause of roughly 80 percent of the smog in Southern California. John R. Froines, UCLA professor of environmental health sciences and an expert on air pollution, will direct the research to be done by scientists at the University of Southern California and UC campuses in Los Angeles, San Francisco and Irvine.

Asthma, cancer, heart attack, reduced lung strength, low birth weight and other maladies have been linked to air pollution, Froines said. But little is known about how the illnesses happen.

The research will attempt to fill some of those gaps in knowledge.

"It's important to find the causes of health effects we are now measuring," Froines said.

The South Coast Air Quality Management District, which regulates air pollution in Orange, Los Angeles and the nondesert portions of Riverside and San Bernardino counties, will contribute \$700,000 to cover the first year of research. Froines said he expects the work to continue for years.

Tresa Ramirez of San Bernardino said the research is overdue. Her 8-year-old son, Jonah, has asthma.

"If that was done a long time ago, a lot of asthma cases could have been prevented," Ramirez said. "If people see what the chemicals are these kids are breathing, it will maybe open a lot of eyes to what needs to be done."

Jonah said he blames his asthma on bad air combined with his love of sports. He is exposed to more pollution because he spends much of his time outdoors playing soccer and roller hockey, he said.

52,000 Inland children

Patrick J. Kudell, executive director of the American Lung Association of the Inland Counties, said that roughly 52,000 children and teenagers under age 18 suffer from asthma in Riverside and San Bernardino counties.

He commended the new research effort.

"Asthma has reached almost epidemic proportions in the South Coast basin, resulting in more lost school days than any other childhood disease," Kudell said in an e-mail. "We hope that the findings may result in smarter-growth planning decisions by cities and counties in this basin."

In an interview, Kudell said he fears that the proliferation of Inland warehousing and distribution centers will increase toxic emissions from diesel trucks.

Froines said the research is necessary to reduce asthma deaths and to answer questions about the effects of certain pollutants important to air-quality regulators. Learning more about pollution from cars and trucks is becoming increasingly vital as Southern California roads and freeways become more crowded, he said.

Inland children will be among the research subjects.

Young air samplers

About 64 children from Riverside and eastern Los Angeles County will carry personal air samplers in backpacks. UC Irvine investigators will analyze the breath the children exhale to determine the effects of the most harmful tail-pipe emissions, known as particulates.

The work is important because the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency currently does not consider the effects of the individual pollutants that together make up particulate pollution, Froines said.

Among the other studies:

UCLA researchers will examine the link between air-pollution exposure and hospitalizations of children from newborn to age 5 for respiratory illnesses and severe asthma. The work is expected to shed light on a critical stage of lung development. The onset of more than 80 percent of persistent asthma cases occurs before age 6.

USC investigators will monitor Long Beach homes in which children live to try to determine whether pollution from traffic causes new asthma cases. Long Beach is a pollution hot spot because of the high volume of diesel trucks serving the seaports.

UCLA and UC San Francisco scientists will explore asthma biology by tracing certain proteins associated with airway inflammation deep inside the lungs. The work may help determine which people are prone to smog-related asthma.

The UCLA group also will study smog-triggered chemical reactions that make smooth muscles in the lung contract, causing shortness of breath and heart attacks.

USC engineers will develop better equipment to collect and analyze ambient air.

About 17 million Americans suffer from asthma, including some 5 million children, according to UCLA. Each day, the disease kills an average of 14 people. The costs include 10 million lost school days and 9 million lost workdays.

There are no estimates for lost school days in the Inland area, Kudell said. But the Inland chapter of the American Lung Association has received a grant to track absences at a sampling of schools next year, he said.

Jonah Ramirez added: "We need to change the air and the laws. We need to stop smog coming from cars, lawn mowers and airplanes."

City's tiny electric cars are easy on the environment

Vehicles get heavy use along trail and at wastewater plant

By Julie Fernandez

Staff writer

Tulare Advance-Register

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That cute little vehicle that made its way along the Tulare Santa Fe Trail during a recent Asthma Coalition walk is one of four small electric cars the city owns.

The Parks Department has had a Neighborhood Electric Vehicle manufactured by Global Electric Motorcars for more than a year. The city purchased three more last October for use at the city's wastewater treatment plant and other departments are considering them as well.

Designed for short trips, the cars operate on 110 volt household current, get about 30 miles per charge and can go up to 25 mph.



Johanna Vossler/Advance-Register

CUTE AND CLEAN: Michael Miller of the city of Tulare gives volunteer Verna Lander a ride in an electric vehicle used for maintenance at Live Oak Park. The city's has four of the cars, which can go 25 mph.

In addition to addressing air-pollution concerns, the vehicle is economical, operating at a penny a mile, according to GEM, which is a DaimlerChrysler Company

The city's policy is to purchase either natural-gas-fueled vehicles or these, acting Public Works Director Lew Nelson said.

Natural-gas vehicles are big cars and they don't make sense "if all you're talking about doing is running around town picking up parts or something of that nature," Nelson said.

Gem cars that are licensed can be driven on streets with posted speeds of 35 mph or less, he said.

A California Department of Forestry grant provided the city with its first GEM car in late 2002.

"We're using it here and there, but where it's really become advantageous is on the trail," Parks Superintendent Robert Doi said. The vehicle is used to maintain the four-mile cross-town pedestrian, cyclist and equestrian trail.

"It's small, light and maneuverable," Doi said. "It's also handy to use for field maintenance, like our sports fields." The vehicle can be driven at 15 mph on turf.

The limited travel distance is not a problem, he said. "A lot of our vehicles don't drive over 25 miles a day anyway."

Short on trucks, the Public Works Department purchased three GEM cars for its huge treatment plant in October.

"I think they're wonderful for running around out here," said Mike Kimbrell, who works in the plant's maintenance department. "We go a full day and then we plug them in at night and they haven't gone dead on us yet."

The city was buying pickup trucks for the plant because "it's a big area out there," but the GEM cars do not pollute the air and the three that were purchased cost less than one truck, Nelson said.

The three cars cost the city \$13,900, Fleet Maintenance Superintendent Larry Walker said, adding government agencies get a discount on the vehicles.

The cars have removable doors and heaters, so workers are comfortable in inclement weather, Nelson said.

Neighborhood Electric Vehicles of all types are also used in retirement and planned communities and in farming operations, where short trips are common.

After trying out Pathway's NEV for a year as part of a special loan program, Brian Blain of Visalia decided a month ago to purchase eight or nine of them for Blain Farming operations.

"We found that we could use them in place of some of the four-wheel quads," Blain said "They were cheaper to operate and purchase. We also found employees liked driving them better ... because there was no heat from engines. We could drive them on the road, if we needed to, although we don't do that."

A Fresno builder is including a GEM car with every house purchase, Nelson said. "Theirs is a planned development where they have grocery stores."

Cars with internal combustion engines pollute the most at start-up before the catalytic convertor is warm, so using NEVs for short trips can help improve air quality, manufacturers maintain.

But Blain has read reports that cause him to question claims the vehicles are "pollution-free," especially if the electricity to run them comes from plants that burn fossil fuel.

"When you convert fossil fuel to electricity, you lose 30 percent efficiency," he said. "If we drive the same number of miles in an electric car versus an automobile, we're consuming 30 percent more fossil fuel."

The difference is the pollution related to the electric car is concentrated at the plant site and not where the vehicle is being driven, he said.

"We're really talking about moving the source of the pollution."

Acknowledging such arguments, GEM responds on its Web site that because NEVs are designed for lower speeds and weighs less than conventional cars -- as little as 900 pounds -- they require less energy and have "far less" impact on the environment than conventional cars.

[Letter to the Editor, The Bakersfield Californian](#)

Group controlling our lives

March 18, 2004

Do you ever wonder who asked the Citizens for Local Control to deny the rest of us the rights to enjoy larger, cleaner stores in the southwest side of town?

The northwest has the Northwest Promenade. The east has East Hills Mall. We are left with a very old Kmart and a very old Wal-Mart. Who asked them to take away our rights to have local shopping opportunities?

Public hearings were held, and once again when they didn't get their way, they go to the liberal courts to stall our opportunities. Some of the complaints brought forward by the group are more air pollution. Malarkey. We create even more driving 20 miles back and forth across town. What about saving the fossil fuels for the next generation?

Next example provided was the economical impact the supermarkets might encounter. Whoop-tee-do. Did they think of the mom and pop markets that were trampled under the feet of the Albertsons, Ralphs and Lucky's when they moved in?

Where were they when Home Base or Lumberjack closed? Do you think that this group of people would be protesting if they actually shopped at the southwest Wal-Mart?

There is a little more to this than meets the eye. Next time I would hope that those of us who would like to enjoy the convenience of shopping locally, possibly walking to the store, are given the opportunity that a democracy affords us and a big giant cash cow to pay our legal fees.

DAVID W. BERTRAM, Bakersfield