



NEWS



News Headlines 5/23/2017

- Air quality suffers as smog and fire seasons start in Southern California
- Needles man tries to set his own apartment on fire
- Firefighters Extinguish Fire at the Pavilion Apartments in Victorville
- Q&A: Winter rains bring new wildfire dangers in Southern California
- Fire at the Landers County Landfill Last Night

Air quality suffers as smog and fire seasons start in Southern California

Beatriz E. Valenzuela and Ali Tadayon, Press Enterprise

Posted: May 22, 2017, 6:53 PM



Redlands Fire Department and Cal Fire fight a brush fire near the 210 Freeway and east of Palm Ave., in Redlands, Ca., Sunday, May 21, 2017. (Photo by John Valenzuela, The Facts/SCNG)

If you noticed something in the air Monday, you weren't imagining things. Smog season, and fire season, have begun, contributing to potentially unhealthy air quality across parts of the Inland Empire.

A fire that burned about 13 acres in the Santa Ana River bottom near the Redlands-Highland border Sunday, and continued smoldering Monday, put out enough smoke to affect several schools in the San Bernardino area.

Dr. Cameron Nouri, emergency medicine director at Community Hospital of San Bernardino, said the facility had more asthma patients Monday than he's seen in weeks.

Another fire at the south end of Reche Canyon near Moreno Valley charred 35 acres Sunday, fueled by tall grasses, a prime concern of fire officials this year following a drought-busting rainy season.

But Cal Fire/Riverside County Fire Department spokeswoman Jody Hagemann didn't think that fire would have affected air quality Monday because it burned out Sunday evening and the wind since then fanned out the smoke.

San Bernardino County Fire Department spokeswoman Tracey Martinez said the agency responded to more than a dozen calls for vegetation fires Sunday and Monday.

"It was definitely a busy weekend, but it's going to get worse as it heats up and the vegetation starts drying out," Martinez said.

The upcoming Memorial Day weekend and the outdoor barbecues that go along with it are another concern for fire authorities, who remind people to be vigilant in containing their open-flame cooking fires.

"We want people to know to be careful," Cal Fire Capt. Liz Brown said. "We are going to have a lot of these quick pop-up fires, but when the winds start, they can get worse."

Smoky classrooms

Several schools on the west side of San Bernardino were affected by smoke that blew into the city, according to the San Bernardino City Unified School District Office of Safety & Emergency Management.

Most of the reports involved a smoky smell in some classrooms, but as soon as the filtered air conditioners — which are turned off over the weekend — began running, the smoke dissipated, said Eric Vetere, the district’s safety and emergency manager.

“We sent out two alerts to the schools to keep them up to date on heat and air quality,” he said.

The district advised school officials to keep students inside if things got worse and limit strenuous activity. It was up to each school to decide what actions to take, Vetere said.

The Redlands Unified School District “carefully monitored” the South Coast Air Quality Management District website Monday because of the fires, officials said in an evening statement.

Colton Joint Unified School District did not put out any alerts Monday, a spokeswoman said.

Ozone in the air

The Air Quality Management District tracks air quality across Southern California.

Its forecast for Tuesday predicts that ozone air pollution will be unhealthy for sensitive groups, such as those with respiratory or cardiac conditions, in eastern and central San Bernardino, and moderate or good in the rest of the Inland area.

Ozone is the hallmark pollutant of summer smog. It forms when different kinds of pollutants react with each other in the atmosphere. Smog season lasts through September.

So far this year, Southern California failed to meet the federal health standard for ozone during 26 days — three more days than last year at this time of the year, according to state data.

Used syringes hamper firefighters

Firefighters battling Sunday’s Redlands blaze found an illegal medical waste dump that included used needles, which prevented crews from entering the area, the Redlands Fire Department said via Facebook.

The fire was reported about 1:50 p.m. just north of the 210/10 interchange. The 210 was soon shut down in both directions between San Bernardino Avenue and 5th Street because of the smoke billowing across the highway and the large firefighting response.

The flames crept toward the eastbound side’s guardrail, then jumped the freeway about 3 p.m., but soon after firefighters began to get a good handle on it. Freeway lanes were gradually opened through the afternoon and evening.

Despite the safety hindrance posed by the syringes, crews got the fire 100 percent contained. Within the containment lines, however, the fire was still burning Monday.

An investigation into the dumping cannot be launched until the flames are completely out, said Redlands spokesman Carl Baker.

The cause of the fire also is under investigation. Battalion Chief David Graves said Sunday that the blaze started near several homeless encampments, and was likely human-caused. "There are really no natural ignition sources out there," he said.

Tall grasses fuel fire

High temperatures, low relative humidity and tall, dry grass helped fuel the Reche Canyon fire, which started about 4 p.m. Sunday near the northern border of Moreno Valley.

It spread rapidly up a hill and immediately threatened one home, Cal Fire/Riverside County Fire Department Battalion Chief Josh Janssen said.

Firefighters attacked "aggressively" with ground crews and air tankers, which dropped retardant on the threatened house and saved it from the flames.

Firefighters also stopped the fire before it burned over a ridge where 12 more houses were located, Janssen said. The fire was fully contained about 10 p.m.

Janssen said the tall grass that grew in abundance this winter and early spring will likely become a fire hazard as conditions get hot and dry.

"We have far more grasses than we have had in the last five years," he said. "That is a very receptive area to fire."

Janssen urges people living in grassy areas to be mindful of the potential wildfire threat, and to mow lawns and use weed whackers early in the morning to reduce the risk that could be posed by any sparks.

Coping with poor air quality

Dr. Cameron Nouri, emergency medicine director at Community Hospital of San Bernardino, offered some advice for people with respiratory and heart conditions.

- Stay inside: Limit outdoor activity when the air quality is poor.
- Be vigilant: Be mindful of the air quality and have medication handy.
- Act quickly: If medication isn't helping, seek medical attention. Nouri said he would rather tell people in the emergency room that they are fine and to go home than have to see them when it's too late.

To check current air-quality conditions, go to the AQMD website.

<http://www.pe.com/2017/05/22/air-quality-suffers-as-smog-and-fire-seasons-start-in-southern-california/>

Needles man tries to set his own apartment on fire

San Bernardino County Sheriff via Desert Independent Newspaper

Posted: May 22, 2017

NEEDLES, Calif – On Sunday, May 21, at about 7:45 in the morning, deputies from the San Bernardino County Sheriff - Colorado River Station / Needles Police Department responded to an apartment complex at 1970 Clary Drive after a fire was reported. At the apartment complex deputies and fire personnel from the **San Bernardino County Fire Department** located an upstairs apartment where a neighbor had extinguished a fire burning on the exterior patio.

Further investigation revealed the sole occupant of the apartment, Andrew Cisneros, attempted to set several fires throughout the interior of the apartment before closing the apartment doors, disabling the smoke alarms, and leaving the home. A neighbor from a separate apartment saw the smoke and fire and extinguished the fire before it became out of control.

All occupants of the building were safely evacuated, and there were no injuries. The fire only damaged personal property and debris belonging to Cisneros. Deputy Bevan found Cisneros walking around the apartment complex, and he was subsequently arrested for arson.

A detective from the Sheriff's Arson/Bomb Detail and an investigator from the San Bernardino County Fire Department were called to the scene to assist with the investigation. Andrew Cisneros (age 27 of Needles) was arrested and booked into the Needles Jail for unlawfully setting a fire. His bail was set at \$25,000.

Persons charged with a crime are considered innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

<http://www.thedesertinde.com/Articles-2017/Needles-man-tries-to-set-his-own-apartment-on-fire--0522.html>

Firefighters Extinguish Fire at the Pavilion Apartments in Victorville

Victor Valley News Group

Posted: May 22, 2017

VICTORVILLE, Calif.(VVNG.com) Several tenants living in an apartment complex were temporarily evacuated due to a fire.

At approximately 12:17 a.m. **San Bernardino County Firefighter** responded to a report of a commercial structure fire at the Pavilion Apartments located in the 1430 block of Mc Art Road in Victorville.

When firefighters arrived they discovered light smoke showing from the roof of a 16 unit apartment complex.

“Upon further investigation, we discovered we had a small fire on the roof,” stated Fire Captain Jesse Martinez.

Tenants in the D building were evacuated while firefighters worked on locating the source of the fire.

Firefighters had to cut open the roof to confine and located the fire to extinguish it, stated Martinez.

Residents told Victor Valley News the building was in the process of undergoing roof repairs.

The response from San Bernardino County Fire included 3 engine companies, 3 truck companies, a squad, and a Battalion Chief.

No injuries were reported as a result of the fire. The cause of the fire remains under investigation.

<http://www.vvng.com/firefighters-extinguish-fire-pavilion-apartments-victorville/>

Q&A: Winter rains bring new wildfire dangers in Southern California

Louis Sahagun, LA Times

Posted: May 23, 2017, 3:00 AM



Richard Minnich, a fire ecologist at UC Riverside, surveys forests near the San Bernardino Mountain resort community of Lake Arrowhead, Calif. (Louis Sahagun/Los Angeles Times)



Areas with extreme forest fire danger in the San Bernardino Mountains. (Richard Minnich)

Richard Minnich didn't have to go far on a recent weekday morning to find an immense fire hazard surrounding the resort town of Lake Arrowhead and nearby communities in the San Bernardino Mountains.

Standing on a roadside pullout, Minnich eyed the culprit: a dense forest of pines and thickets that gives an alpine look to Lake Arrowhead. The site, historically known as Little Bear Valley, is home to about 12,000 permanent residents and attracts summer crowds of up to 80,000.

The unbroken vista of lush green is the result of more than a century of fire suppression. Each time firefighters put out a small blaze, unburned brush and timber was left to fuel future fires.

“People here want to live . . . in the majesty of nature,” Minnich, a fire ecologist at UC Riverside, said with a sigh. “But the forest all around them is ripe for a massive fire that is going to wipe it out and take thousands of homes nestled in the woods along with it.”

Minnich, 71, forecasts the probability of fire risks throughout Southern California based on meteorological and historical records, aerial photographs and ecological studies.

With the long Memorial Day weekend approaching, The Times grabbed a stump and listened to Minnich’s predictions for Southern California’s 2017 fire season.

Looking at the data, what is this year’s outlook?

Wet winter increases the risk for early fires in grassy hillsides, followed by postponed chaparral and forest fires in areas that have not burned for more than a century.

Why are you so edgy about Lake Arrowhead?

Lake Arrowhead has not burned since 1879. So, the thick forest of old pines towering over thickets of younger trees and chaparral there is capable of burning the entire forest to the tree tops. This is what happened in a San Gorgonio Mountain fire in 2015, where nearly 10,000 acres were charred, leaving a massive gap in the forest that will persist for a century or longer.

Didn’t our recent heavy winter rains make trees and brush less flammable?

Yes, up to a point.

The overall fire hazard varies year by year, depending on winter rainfall. For example, the onset of fire season comes later in summer and fall after a wet winter, and arrives earlier in spring and summer after dry winters like the ones we had during the recent five-year drought.

Regardless of rainfall, however, the fire hazard in a specific region is defined by its fire history and the effect it has had on the landscape.

That’s because fires preferentially burn old chaparral and conifers. Hence, the oldest stands of trees are always the next in line to burn.

Which areas face the greatest risk for forest fires?

I’m most concerned about communities in pine forests that haven’t burned since the 19th century: Big Bear Lake and Lake Arrowhead in the eastern San Bernardino Mountains, and Idyllwild in the San Jacinto Mountains.

These areas have hundreds of trees per acre with trunks more than 4 inches in diameter and an understory of young conifers and brush. By way of comparison, a healthy, safer forest has about 13 such trees per acre.

In the event of a fire, the heavy understory will create what foresters call a “fuel ladder” that sends flames climbing up into the canopy, triggering a massive blaze.

Also worrisome are stands of chaparral blanketing the San Bernardino Mountains east of Redlands, which haven't burned in 60 to 120 years. This situation predicts future burns in those areas for decades to come.

What about the intersections where open grasslands and the suburbs clash head-on?

Grass that flourished on hillsides during the rains is already drying out and becoming kindling for extensive and frequent fires in places such as the Perris Basin in Riverside County, the Puente Hills-La Habra Heights area in eastern Los Angeles County, and the rolling hills of the northern San Fernando Valley.

The good news is that if the grass doesn't burn this summer, it will break down in the next winter rains.

Where is the risk of wildfires lowest?

Areas that have less risk already burned fires over the past 10 to 20 years. They include much of the chaparral in the western San Bernardino Mountains and most of the San Gabriel Mountains, with the exception of the Sierra Madre and Mount Wilson areas, which haven't burned since 1924.

Should firefighters just give up, knowing that fire is inevitable in forests of old trees towering over thickets?

Here's the ecological bottom line: The more burns in a given forested area, the smaller and more manageable fires will be there in the future.

<http://www.latimes.com/local/la-me-wildfire-predictions-20170522-htlstory.html>

Fire at the Landers County Landfill Last Night

Z107.7 News

Posted: May 23, 2017



This metal item hit the engine from Station 41 in Yucca Valley while firefighters were battling a fire at the county landfill.

Firefighters spent Monday evening battling a fire at the county landfill in Landers. County Fire Battalion Chief Mike Snow said the call came in about 6 p.m. and Yucca Mesa firefighters arrived at the dump to find refuse about 100 feet by 100 feet on fire. Firefighters called in a water tender from Yucca Mesa and an additional engine from Yucca Valley to assist. With help from landfill crews who used heavy equipment to spread out the debris, firefighters had the blaze out in about 1 ½ hours. Medic Engine 42 from Yucca Valley was slightly damaged by an object that exploded and sent a projectile from the fire into the side of the fire engine. There were no injuries. The cause is under investigation.

<http://z1077fm.com/fire-at-the-landers-county-landfill-last-night/>