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DATE: August 20, 2026

TO: SJVUAPCD Governing Board

FROM: Samir Sheikh, Executive Director/APCO
Project Coordinator: Jon Klassen/Jaime Holt

RE: **ITEM NUMBER 10: UPDATE ON 2026 WILDFIRE
PREVENTION AND RESPONSE EFFORTS**

BACKGROUND:

Air pollution generated from wildfires is enormous and can well exceed the total industrial and mobile source emissions in the San Joaquin Valley, overwhelming all control measures and resulting in periods of excessively high particulate matter and ozone concentrations that cause significant impacts to public health. Your Board has long supported efforts to reduce the intensity and frequency of wildfires through enhanced forest management measures to reduce fuel buildup in the forests. However, excessive fuel build-up in the state's wildlands due to decades of fire suppression, widespread drought-driven tree mortality, and changing climate conditions, including higher temperatures and drier conditions in recent years, have contributed to extended and more intense wildfire seasons in the western United States. The 2026 wildfire season has already been very active, and is expected to continue into the late summer and fall.

To help mitigate the effects of wildfire smoke on Valley residents, the District implements various actions and operates programs to help residents protect themselves during wildfire smoke events. The purpose of this item is to provide updates on the 2026 wildfire season to date, and summarize the District's efforts to provide outreach and resources to Valley residents during periods of poor air quality due to wildfires.

DISCUSSION:

The 2026 wildfire season across California has already been very active, including a number of large fires. The figure below from CAL FIRE shows that the 2026 season has already experienced 255,357 acres burned, while 2025 had 354,878 acres burned from wildfires up to this date in time.

Figure 1: Comparison of Year-to-Date Wildfire Activity in California (as of 8/14/26)

CALIFORNIA TOTAL WILDLAND FIRE STATS YTD		
Year-To-Date (YTD) is for current year, last year, and 5-year average, as of the "Updated" date indicated above.		
INTERVAL	WILDLAND FIRES	ACRES
2026 Combined YTD (CALFIRE & US Forest Service)	4,641	255,357
2025 Combined YTD (CALFIRE & US Forest Service)	5,362	354,878
5-Year Average (same interval)	5,935	544,237

Source: CAL FIRE

In more detail, the 2026 wildfire season has included a number of significant fires in the region that have impacted the Valley's air quality, including the Fields Fire in Merced County, the Fish Fire in Kern County, and the Gann Fire in Calaveras County. The following figure lists the larger wildfires that have impacted the Valley's air quality so far during the 2026 season. The District will continue to track active wildfires impacting the region's air quality, and will continue to implement its outreach strategy, as discussed in the following section.

Figure 2: 2026 Wildfire Activity Impacting Valley Air Quality

Name of Fire	Date of Origin	County	Last Reported Size (Acres)
Ranch Fire	4/28/2026	Kern	343
Canyon Fire	5/7/2026	Kern	2,278
Santa Rosa Island Fire	5/15/2026	Santa Barbara	18,379
River Fire	5/18/2026	Kern	3,535
Wood Fire	5/18/2026	Kern	469
21 st Fire	6/1/2026	Kings	300
Macy Fire	6/5/2026	Kern, Los Angeles	1,194
Waltz Fire	6/5/2026	Mariposa	1,644
Lincoln Fire	6/16/2026	Merced	734
Kane Springs	6/17/2026	Lincoln, Nevada	17,042

Name of Fire	Date of Origin	County	Last Reported Size (Acres)
Grapevine	6/17/2026	Lincoln, Nevada	26,464
Lost Fire	6/18/2026	Kern	7,834
Star Fire	6/19/2026	Kern	577
Bear Fire	7/7/2026	San Luis Obispo	543
Biscar Fire	7/17/2026	Lassen	69,355
Rock Fire	7/20/2026	Inyo	12,008
Fields Fire	7/23/2026	Merced	1,280
Mines Fire	7/26/2026	Santa Clara	282
Fish Fire	7/27/2026	Kern	4,201
Gann Fire	8/3/2026	Calaveras	10,373
Ridge Fire	8/7/2026	Los Angeles	1,134
Antelope Fire	8/8/2026	San Luis Obispo, Kern	2,410
Hatchet Fire	8/9/2026	Tulare	606
Plains Fire	8/12/2026	San Luis Obispo	2,588

DISTRICT RESPONSE DURING WILDFIRE AIR QUALITY IMPACTS:

Smoke and ash from wildfires contain very small particles known as particulate matter. These particles harm the lungs and heart, and can cause coughing, wheezing, difficulty breathing, chest pain, nausea, and in severe instances, premature mortality. People with heart or lung disease, seniors, children, and pregnant women are especially sensitive to smoke. The best protection for residents during wildfire episodes starts with awareness of elevated pollution levels, minimizing outdoor activities and staying indoors as much as possible when smoke is present, which also emphasizes the importance of keeping indoor air clean.

Due to the significant health impacts associated with wildfire smoke, the District prioritizes and dedicates resources to notifying the public regarding air quality conditions and steps the public can take to protect their health. The District works collaboratively with the public, media, land managers, schools and school districts, community-based organizations, county public health officers, and other stakeholders to alert the public of poor air quality and increase the understanding of the devastating public health impacts of wildfires as well as the need for improved management of public forests.

The following is a list of measures the District deploys during episodes of poor air quality related to wildfire smoke to provide Valley residents with timely information on air quality and provide advice on recommended preventative actions they may consider:

Partnership with Local Public Health Officers and Directors

The District has maintained a longstanding partnership with the Public Health Officers and Directors representing the San Joaquin Valley's eight counties to coordinate on air quality and public health issues. As part of this ongoing collaboration, the District annually convenes a Wildfire Smoke Preparedness Meeting to coordinate with public health partners in advance of the wildfire season. The June 18, 2026, meeting drew a record attendance of more than 40 public health representatives. The meeting provides an opportunity to discuss the seasonal wildfire outlook, potential air quality and public health impacts, and the District's planned outreach efforts, while sharing resources and communication tools to support coordinated public information and preparedness activities throughout the Valley.

During episodes of poor air quality related to wildfire smoke, the District reaches out directly to county health partners in an effort to ensure a uniform message, and to offer information and resources for the counties to use in addressing public concerns. Additionally, the District regularly meets with public health officials from around the Valley to ensure coordination and strong communication during unique air quality events. The District also participates in the Central California Public Health Consortium which is a forum for County Public Health Directors and Health Officers and other partners to collaborate and exchange ideas and information and to develop regional strategies for addressing pressing public health issues faced by the counties and the region. The Consortium is facilitated by the Central California Center for Health and Human Services at California State University, Fresno.

Coordination with Land Managers to Assist in Wildfire Response

The District works closely with local, state and federal land management agencies on a daily basis throughout the year, and increasingly during wildfire episodes, to provide technical support and enhance wildfire response coordination efforts and public outreach. In coordination with land managers and CARB, the District assists in the deployment of temporary monitors to measure PM_{2.5} in communities that may be impacted by wildfires, providing critical local air quality data to assist residents in making decisions to protect their health. Additionally, the District works with land management partners to support enhanced forest management efforts that address the extraordinary build-up of fuels in our surrounding forests and minimize wildfire impacts in the future.

Role and Efforts of Local Fire Safety Organizations

In the past, distributing federal grant funding to wildfire-prone areas of the nation was often a lengthy and cumbersome process. In light of this, the federal government established the National Fire Plan and the Healthy Forest Restoration Act as a vehicle to provide more funding to local community groups focused on reducing fuel and wildfire risk. At the same time of these federal actions, in 1993 the state established the California Fire Safe Council (CFSC) as a project of Cal Fire.

The CFSC focuses on bringing together community leaders, residents, and government agencies to help educate people living in wildfire-prone areas of the state about the need for fuel reduction, reducing wildfire risk, and promoting fire safe practices. The

CFSC also focuses on creating the Fire Safe Council concept to place a stronger focus on local efforts to provide education and reduce wildfire risk. Local Fire Safe Councils continue to operate in the Valley today and work closely with foothill and mountain community residents.

In order to increase efficiency in distributing grant funding, the CFSC serves as the clearinghouse and distributor of fire prevention and mitigation funds from the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and the Fish & Wildlife Service. Local Fire Safe Councils (LFSCs), fire departments, governments, and other groups then use these grant funds from the CFSC to conduct their work. Since inception, the CFSC has provided more than 1,200 grants totaling more than \$140 million to improve fire-resiliency across the state¹. Anyone can initiate the formation of an LFSC when there is a shared concern about wildfire safety. LFSCs are coalitions of public and private sector organizations with membership often consisting of residents, local fire agencies, utilities, environmental groups, landscapers, real estate agents, local political leaders, homeowners associations, and other groups. The purpose of LFSCs is to work with local, county, and state fire agencies to make their communities safer places to live by developing an emergency preparedness plan for the community before a wildfire occurs, providing a space for community residents and organizations to voice concerns about public safety issues, and seeking funding and implementing fuels reduction and education and outreach projects.

There are over 150 LFCS throughout the state with the following nine operating within the San Joaquin Valley:

- Alder Creek (Tulare County)
- Eastern Madera County (Madera County)
- Highway 168 (Fresno County)
- Kern (Kern County)
- Oak to Timberline (Fresno County)
- Sequoia (Tulare County)
- Sierra Sky (Madera County)
- Springville (Tulare County)
- Three Rivers (Tulare County)

Opportunities still exist for adding new LFSCs and interested parties are encouraged to reach out directly to the California Fire Safe Council for more information. The District strives to stay connected with these LFSCs through sharing program information, attending meetings, and providing support where needed.

District Wildfire Prevention Efforts

In support of wildfire prevention and long-term forest health, the District works collaboratively with federal, state, and local land management agencies to advance forest management efforts that reduce the extraordinary accumulation of hazardous fuels in the region's forests and lessen the severity of future wildfires. District staff

¹ <https://cafiresafecouncil.org/about-us/about/>

regularly participate in statewide and regional coordination meetings with air and land management agencies to support land management strategies, including the appropriate use of beneficial fire through planned burning projects.

To further strengthen regional coordination, the District hosted its Annual Fire Partner Cooperators Meeting in May 2026, bringing together land management agencies from throughout the San Joaquin Valley for a half day workshop. The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss state and federal policy updates, prescribed burning procedures and best practices, lessons learned from the 2025 wildfire season, and preparations and outlook for the 2026 fire season. The annual workshop also supports coordination on procedures for the successful implementation of planned ignition projects as part of comprehensive forest management programs designed to reduce hazardous fuels and decrease the intensity and impacts of future wildfires.

Figure 3: 2026 Annual Fire Partner Cooperators Meeting

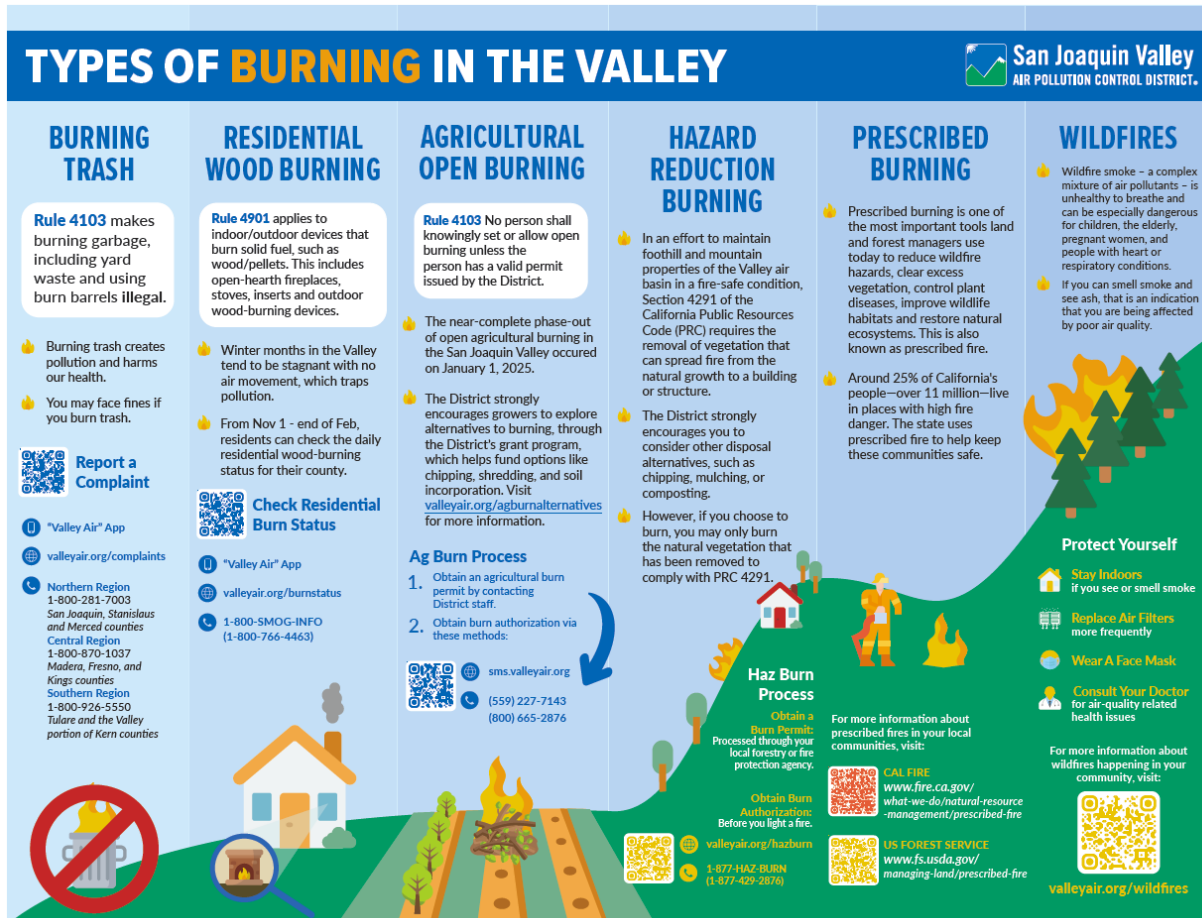


The District also leverages advanced planning and forecasting tools, including the State of California's Prescribed Fire Information Reporting System (PFIRS), along with sophisticated air quality, smoke dispersion, and weather modeling, to assist land managers in planning prescribed burns while minimizing potential air quality impacts. In addition, the District works closely with Cal Fire to support implementation of the Hazard Reduction Burning Program in mountain and foothill communities, helping ensure that fuel reduction activities are conducted safely and effectively while minimizing fire hazards, traffic impacts, public nuisances, and air quality concerns.

Recognizing the importance of public understanding, the District also conducts ongoing outreach to educate Valley residents about the different types of burning that occur

throughout the region, the regulatory requirements governing each, and the important role that properly managed prescribed fire and hazard reduction activities play in improving forest health, reducing wildfire risk, and protecting public health over the long term.

Figure 4: Types of Burning in the Valley



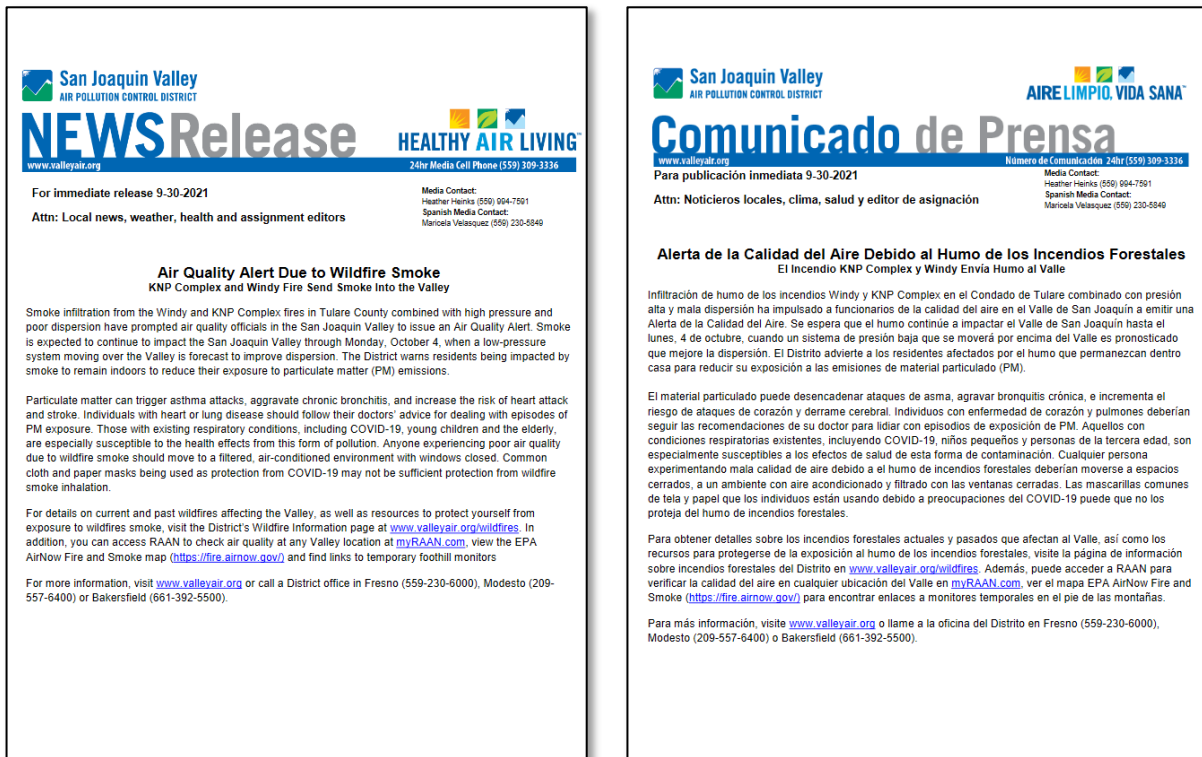
Daily Communication with Traditional Media Outlets

The District manages a media contact list of over 200 Valley meteorologists, reporters, news directors and opinion editors. District staff work to build strong relationships with both English and Spanish language Valley media and are often the first call that reporters make when beginning an air quality story. During episodes of poor air quality related to wildfire smoke, staff speak directly to local media on a weekly if not daily basis. TV and radio stations throughout the Valley communicate the daily air quality forecast, and during episodes of poor air quality related to wildfire smoke, air quality is often one of the top news stories.

In addition, the District alerts the public during poor air quality episodes in both English and Spanish and encourages residents to stay informed of current air quality conditions in their area by following our Real-Time Air Advisory Network via our mobile device app

and at www.myraan.com or other available mobile tools, such as EPA's AirNow mobile application and website www.airnow.gov.

Figure 5: Examples of Bilingual Press Releases

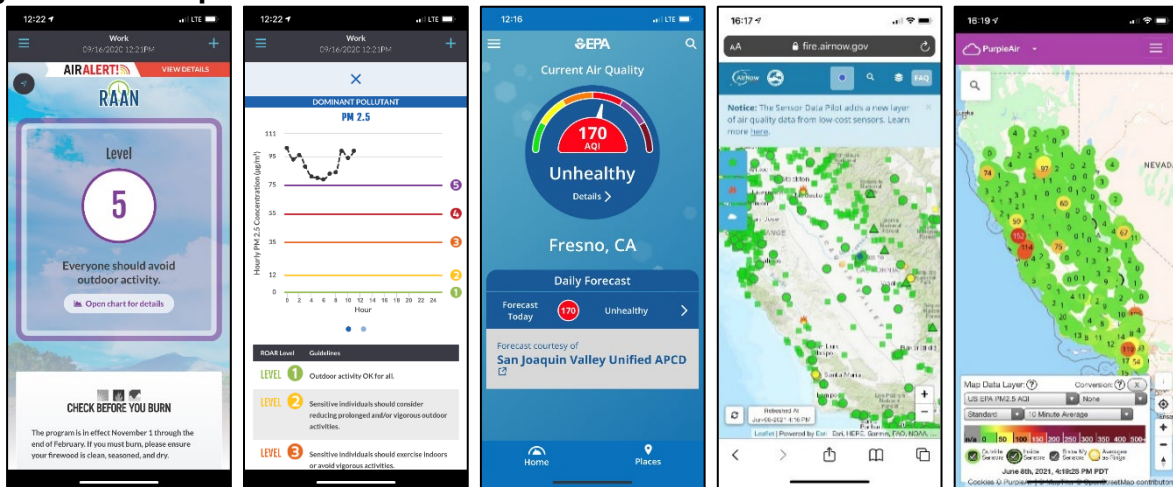


Finally, during extreme air quality episodes, the District works with the National Weather Service to issue Air Quality Alerts to ensure that air alert messaging is relayed through the variety of products they deploy to the public and the media.

Educating Residents Regarding Available Air Quality Tools

Residents have found the District's mobile and online air quality information useful as it provides accurate real-time air quality information and notifications in an easily consumable way. While the District's Valley Air mobile application has been well-received by the public, many new air quality tools have become available in recent years, and the District actively promotes these tools to ensure that Valley residents have the full range of information available to them. In addition to mobile applications, a number of web-based air quality resources have recently become available that utilize a combination of regulatory-grade air monitors, temporary air monitors, and low-cost sensors to provide real-time information regarding wildfire smoke impacts (EPA's fire.airnow.gov).

Figure 6: Examples of Mobile Resources

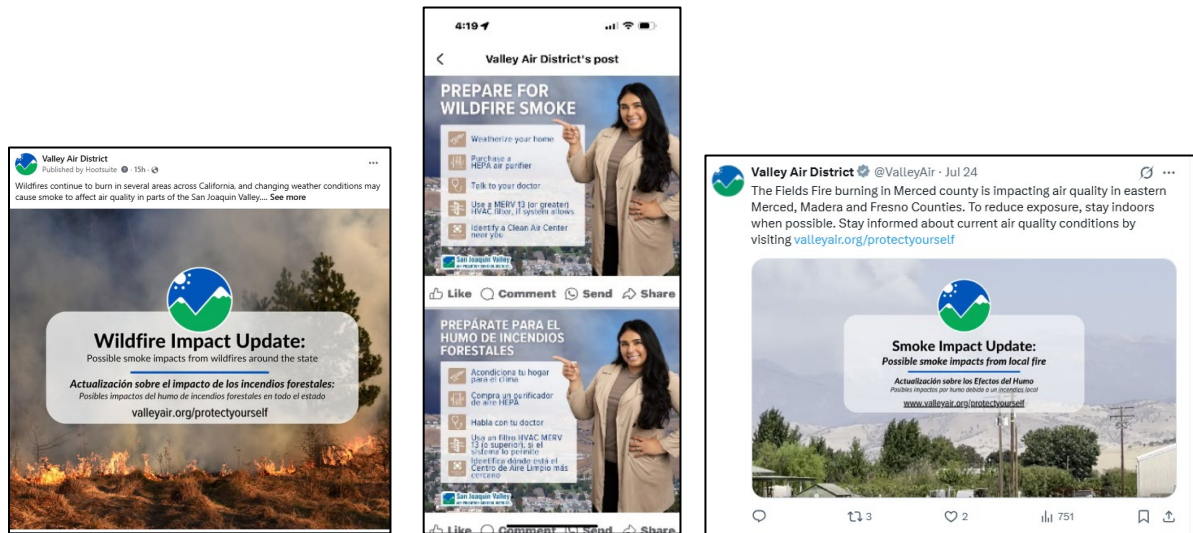


Digital Public Outreach and Social Media Communications

During episodes of poor air quality related to wildfire smoke, the District utilizes both organic and paid social media outreach to rapidly communicate timely health information to Valley residents. Organic posts across the District's Facebook, X, Threads, Nextdoor, and Instagram platforms provide current updates on air quality conditions, wildfire impacts, available air quality resources, and practical steps individuals can take to protect themselves and their families. All messaging is developed and distributed in both English and Spanish to maximize accessibility throughout the Valley.

To further extend the reach of these important public health messages, the District also deploys strategically targeted paid social media campaigns during significant wildfire smoke events. Paid outreach allows the District to reach residents beyond its existing followers, targeting communities experiencing the greatest air quality impacts while ensuring critical health information is delivered quickly to vulnerable populations. This combined organic and paid approach significantly expands message reach and engagement, helping ensure residents receive timely, trusted information during rapidly changing wildfire conditions. Below are examples of social media posts and their reach within the community.

Figure 7: Examples of Social Media Posts



Working with Valley Schools

Youth and school outreach is a top priority for the District. This effort currently focuses on providing educators with real-time air quality information aimed at protecting students during episodes of poor air quality; engagement of teachers and students through the “Healthy Air Heroes” K-6 activity kit (available in English and Spanish), annual kids calendar contest; and efforts to urge action by students and parents to reduce air pollution such as the “Turn the Key, Be Idle Free” no-idling program. The District has built partnerships with many of the Valley’s school districts through this program, and during wildfire smoke episodes, the District communicates directly with affected schools to ensure that they have accurate air quality information and discourage outdoor activities when experiencing poor air quality conditions.

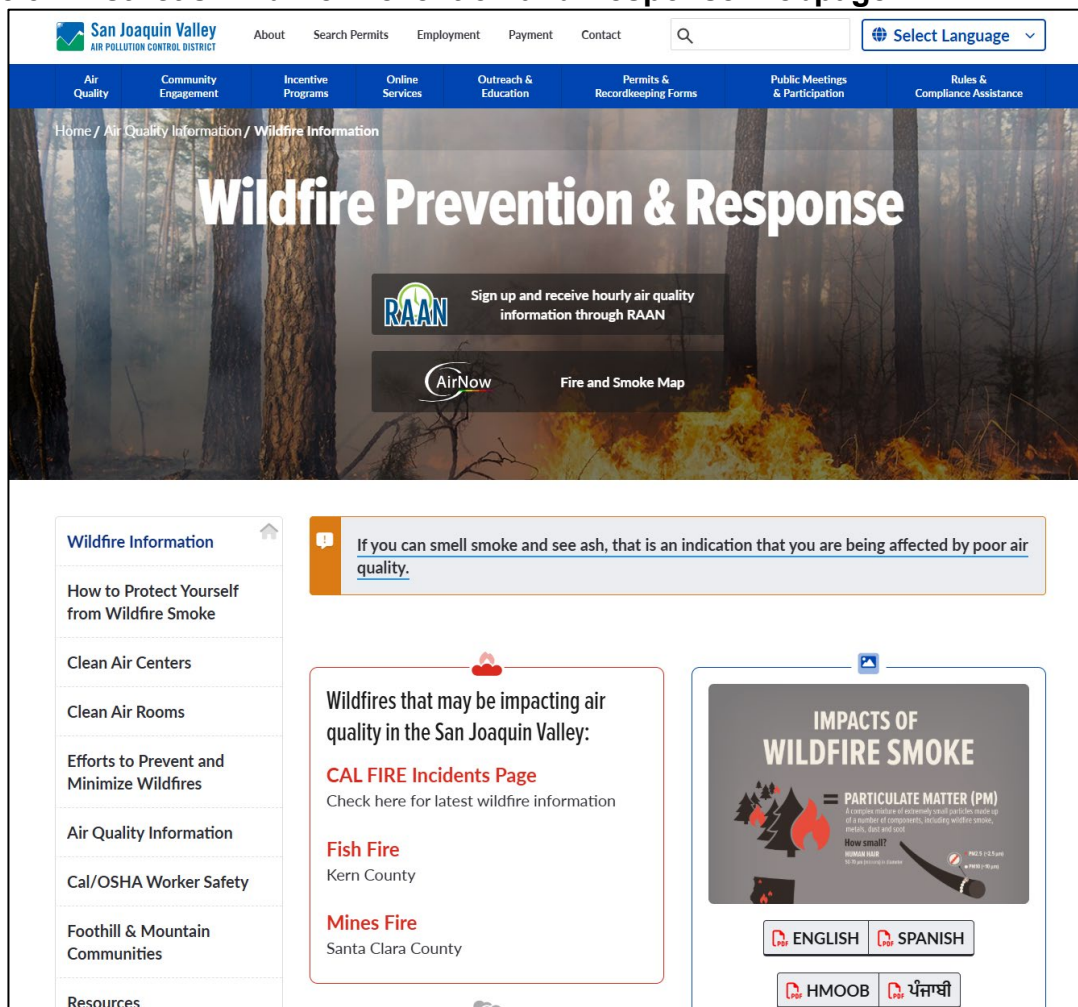
**Figure 8: “Healthy Air Heroes” Kit
 (Also available in Spanish as “Héroes de Aire Limpio”)**



District's Wildfire Web Resource Page

In response to the significant concerns of Valley residents, District staff work diligently to share timely and comprehensive information about wildfires affecting the region. A key resource for the public is the District's Wildfire Prevention and Response page (www.valleyair.org/wildfires), which is updated daily—including weekends and holidays—and serves as a trusted public resource. The page features real-time wildfire and air quality data from CalFire, along with tools to help residents make informed decisions. It provides details on current wildfires, hourly air quality readings, health protection tips, and data from temporary air monitors deployed in mountain and foothill communities. The District works with state and federal land managers to deploy temporary monitors to expand air quality monitoring during wildfire events. All monitoring data is accessible through the Wildfire Resource page, reflecting the District's proactive commitment to delivering the most accurate and up-to-date air quality information during wildfire events.

Figure 9: District's Wildfire Prevention and Response Webpage



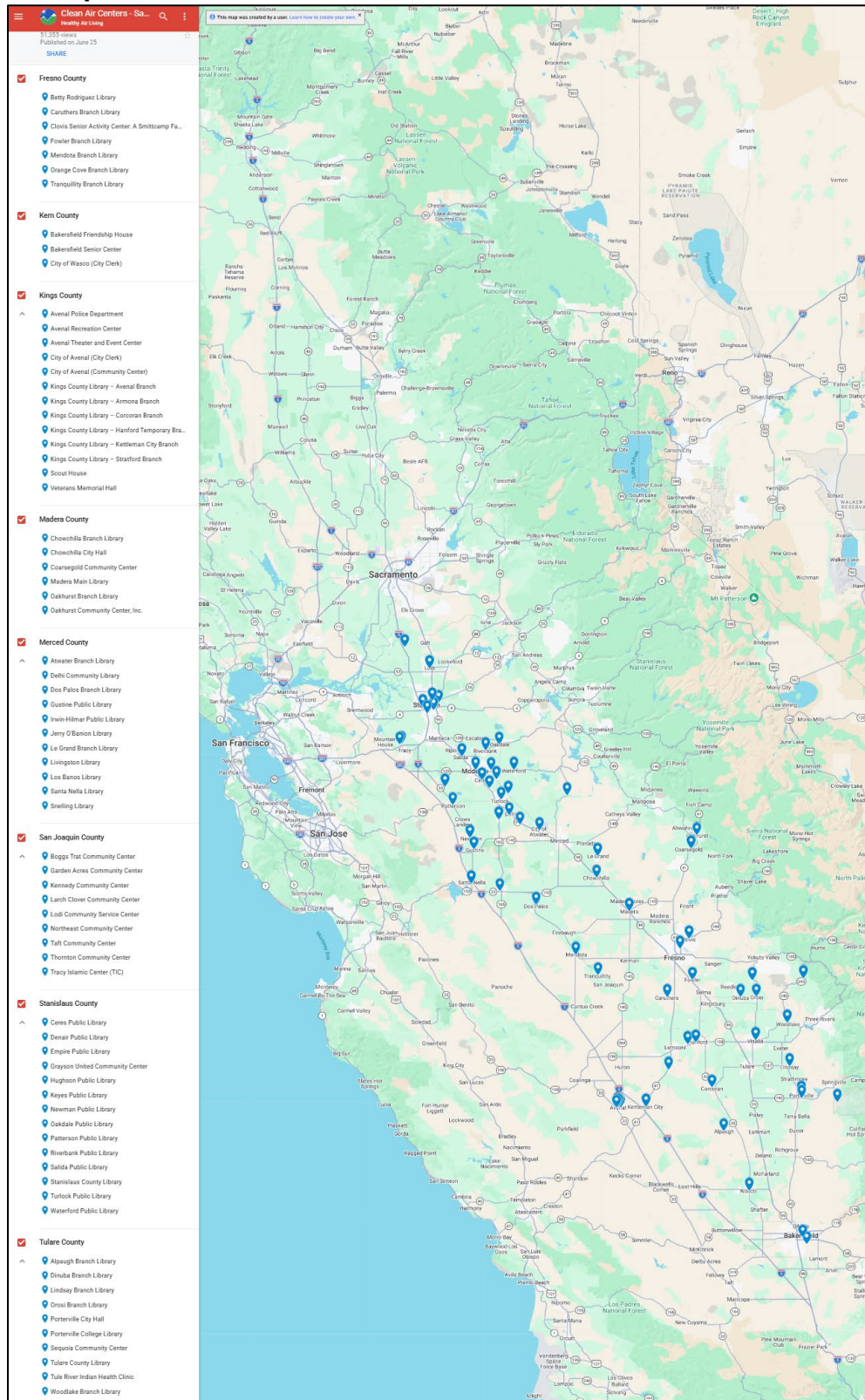
Clean Air Rooms Program

To help mitigate the harmful health effects of wildfire smoke on Valley residents, and in particular the District's most vulnerable populations, the District developed the Clean Air Rooms Program to provide residential air filtration units FREE to Valley residents in disadvantaged communities or low-income households. In a well-sealed indoor environment (e.g., windows and doors closed and sealed tightly), High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filtration devices can reduce particulate matter indoors by more than 90 percent. The District encourages the use of air filtration devices during wildfire events and the creation of "clean air rooms", such as a bedroom, to ensure that homes have a dedicated space with safe indoor air quality during smoke events. Since the launch of the program in 2022, the District has allocated \$8,250,000 and distributed over 26,440 free air filtration units to households throughout the Valley.

Clean Air Centers Program

The District also works with CARB to administer the Clean Air Centers program, which was established by AB 836 (Wicks, Chapter 393, Statutes of 2019) and provided the District \$750,000 in funding for grants to provide portable high-efficiency air cleaners in support of creating a network of clean air centers to offer vulnerable populations a respite from wildfires and other smoke events. The guidelines established by the California Air Resources Board provide the San Joaquin Valley with resources to assist in creating clean air centers at schools, community centers, senior centers, sport centers, libraries and other publicly accessible buildings that will most effectively protect our vulnerable populations during wildfire smoke events. The District has successfully contracted all funds resulting in 74 Clean Air Centers currently in operation along with 5 additional centers awaiting delivery of new devices.

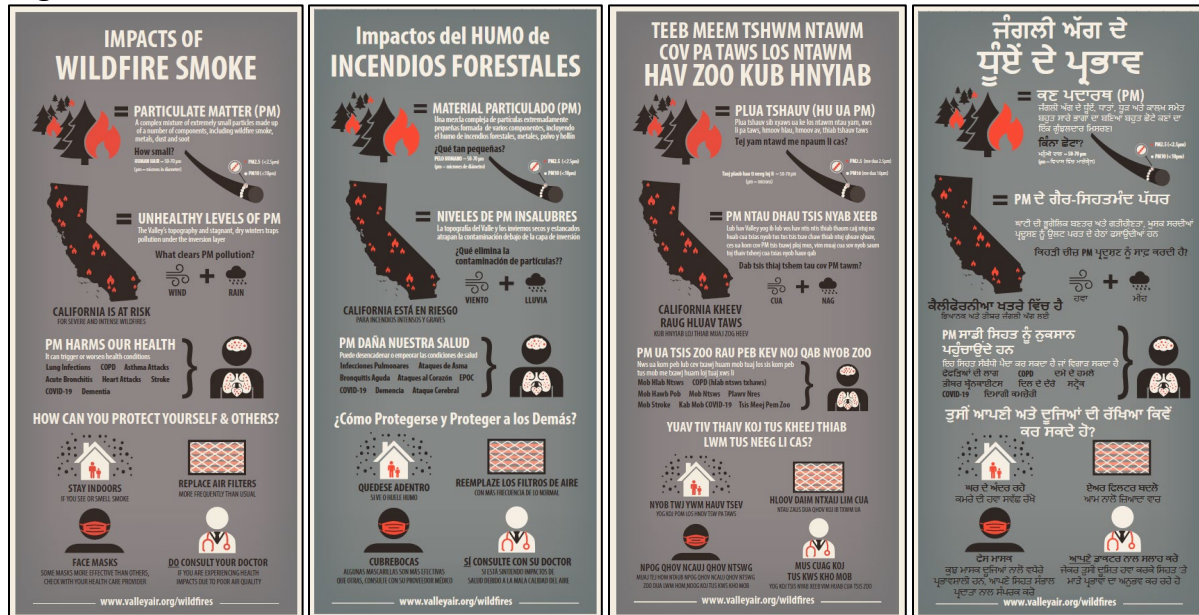
Figure 10: Map of District's Clean Air Centers



Public Outreach at In-person and Virtual Events

District staff attend a significant number of events each year to educate the public about a wide variety of air quality issues including potential air quality impacts that can come from wildfires. Staff host booths at public events such as health fairs, give presentations to groups such as PTAs or civic clubs, provide interactive workshops for students and are available to speak to any group upon request. As part of this outreach, District staff also develop visually appealing bilingual materials to communicate key messages to the public in an easy-to-understand way.

Figure 11: District's Wildfire Outreach Pieces



HEALTH EFFECTS OF WILDFIRE SMOKE

Smoke consists of gases and fine particles that are produced when wood and other organic materials burn. The fine particles in smoke (also known as PM_{2.5}) are microscopic and pose the biggest health risk. PM_{2.5} can enter the eyes and respiratory system, leading to problems like burning eyes, running nose, bronchitis, and worsening chronic heart and lung diseases. These microscopic particles are also linked to premature death.

Know Your Risk
Everyone should minimize their exposure to wildfire smoke. However, certain groups are at higher risk for severe health effects, including:

- People with asthma and other respiratory diseases
- People with cardiovascular disease
- Children (younger than 16)
- Pregnant people
- Older adults
- Outdoor workers

If you have existing health conditions, follow your doctor's advice for dealing with particulate matter exposure and contact them if you experience worse.

To stay informed about the latest wildfires affecting the San Joaquin Valley, visit the District's Wildfire Prevention & Response page at valleyair.org/wildfires. It also provides current air quality and additional health-protective tips for staying safe during smoke events.

For more information, visit valleyair.org or contact the nearest District office.

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Tel: 209-554-6400 FAX: 209-557-6405
Consent Line: 1-800-251-7550

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Consent Line: 1-800-476-0227

Southern Region
Serving Kern and Valley and Kern portions of Kern counties
2400 Highway 99, Lancaster, CA 93534-9720
Tel: 805-782-0000 FAX: 805-782-0980
Consent Line: 1-800-529-0500

WILDFIRE SMOKE READINESS

How to protect yourself from wildfire smoke

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District
1-800 SMOG INFO
valleyair.org

If you can smell smoke and see ash, you are being affected by poor air quality.

Plan Ahead. Create a Clean Air Room
Setting up a clean air room at home can help reduce exposure to wildfire smoke while sheltering indoors.

Buy an Air Purifier
Air purifiers are designed to filter the air in a single room or area. They vary in price and efficiency. Choose an option that is the right size for your room.

Stock up on HEPA Filters
Stock up on replacement filters. Use a high-efficiency filter (rated MERV 13 or higher) if your HVAC system can safely use one.

DIY Air Cleaners
If you can't get an air purifier, consider building a DIY air cleaner with a new box fan and a MERV 13 rated air filter.

Clean Air Centers
The Valley offers a network of publicly accessible facilities with high-efficiency air filtration systems for Valley residents who may not otherwise have access to clean air during wildfire events.

Stay Safe During a Fire
Use the Fire & Smoke Map
Smoke levels can change quickly and significantly during the day. Using the Fire and Smoke Map at fireandsmoke.org and understanding the Air Quality Index (AQI) can help you plan your activities when smoke is in the air.

*The AQI is a numerical scale ranging from 0 to 500 that measures the concentration of pollutants in the air, such as PM_{2.5} and ozone. It categorizes air quality from "Good" to "Hazardous" based on potential health impacts.

Reduce Exposure Outdoors & Indoors
Limit your outdoor exercise when it is smoky outside and stay indoors as much as possible.

Use your clean air room
Air purifiers work best when doors and windows are tightly sealed.

Run your HVAC system
Replace the filters more frequently than usual.

Seek a Clean Air Center
Clean air centers provide a safe place with air filtration systems during periods of heavy smoke.

Wear an N95 mask
If you must be outdoors, N95 respirator masks can provide protection from wildfire smoke when properly fitted.

Clean Air Centers
Public and private entities like schools, libraries, community centers, senior centers, and sports centers can be eligible to obtain funding for commercial grade air filtration systems to become a Clean Air Center. For more information visit valleyair.org/cleanaircenters.