

Station to monitor air pollution in the Temecula Valley

Jeff Horseman, Riverside Press-Enterprise, 7-1-10

The Temecula Valley is getting its first permanent air quality monitoring station to measure microscopic particles that can harm lungs and cause other ailments.

Located in the heights above Lake Skinner, the station is being run by the South Coast Air Quality Management District, a Diamond Bar-based agency that monitors air pollution in Orange County and the non-desert areas of Riverside, San Bernardino and Los Angeles counties.

The district has operated temporary monitoring sites in the valley but decided a permanent station would give the agency a clearer picture of the region's air pollution, said district spokesman Sam Atwood. The nearest permanent stations are in Lake Elsinore and Perris.

The station consists of an air monitoring instrument mounted above a trailer. Readings from the unmanned station are transmitted to the district and analyzed by staff.

Initially, the station will keep track of fine-particle pollution; the microscopic particles can form a brownish haze in the air. The particles can occur naturally but also come from truck and car exhaust, factory smokestacks, road dust and other sources. Soot from diesel engines is the most toxic component of the pollution.

Particle pollution has been linked to cardiovascular disease and breathing problems.

Atwood said the station will be especially useful when monitoring pollution from nearby wildfires. The district issues public warnings when smoke poses a breathing risk.

Technology to monitor other types of air pollution could be brought in later.

Air quality is of particular concern to opponents of Liberty Quarry, a mining operation proposed on 414 acres southwest of the station and near the San Diego County line.

Quarry critics say the mining could increase particle pollution. Quarry developer Granite Construction maintains the quarry would protect air quality through technology and mining practices that capture dust.

Atwood said the quarry was not a factor in the district's decision to set up the station.

Jim Mitchell, a Temecula resident and leader of a local Sierra Club chapter, said the valley's air quality is superior to surrounding areas. He said he hopes that the district has the teeth to crack down on air quality threats and that the station's data are publicly available.

The district's website includes hourly air quality readings for the Inland region.