This page last reviewed July 20, 2009

2008 Northern California Wildfires

Event Description

During the summer of 2008, extreme fuel conditions in Northern and Central California and an unusually intensive outbreak of lightning strikes from a series of dry thunderstorms combined for an unprecedented summer fire season. All of Northern California, and much of Central California, were affected, with smoke and haze lingering over the region for much of the summer.

Numerous monitoring sites, comprising both Federal Reference Method (FRM) and Equivalent Method (FEM) monitors, recorded almost daily elevated particulate matter (PM) concentration levels, with many days above the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for both PM2.5 and PM10, an unusual occurrence in the summer.

ARB is requesting exclusion of data from over 30 monitoring sites in 15 Air Districts where smoke caused levels to exceed those historically seen during the summer low particulate season.

Regulatory Background

The Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) provides the definition and criteria for determining whether air quality data is impacted by an exceptional event. The 40 CFR 50.1 (j)1 definition states that “exceptional event means an event that affects air quality, is not reasonably controllable or preventable, is an event caused by human activity that is unlikely to recur at a particular location or a natural event, and is determined by the Administrator in accordance with 40 CFR 50.14 to be an exceptional event.” The demonstration to justify data exclusion as outlined in 40 CFR 50.14 specifies that evidence must be provided that:

1. The event meets the definition of an exceptional event;
2. There is a clear causal relationship between the measurement under consideration and the event that is claimed to have affected air quality in the area;
3. The event is associated with a measured concentration in excess of normal historical fluctuations, including background; and,
4. There would have been no exceedance or violation but for the event.

Official Exceptional Events Documentation to be Submitted to U.S. EPA

Natural Event Document (pdf - 7 mb)

Appendices

A. Complete List of Monitoring Sites and Days Requested for Exclusion (pdf - 60 kb)
B. Meteorology Surface and Upper-Air Maps (pdf - 3 mb)
C. Satellite Images (pdf - 66 mb)
D. Fire Maps (pdf - 39 mb)
E. NOAA Satellite Services Division, Smoke Maps, and Smoke Text Products (pdf - 8.5 mb)
F. Health and Smoke Advisories (pdf - 8 mb)
G. Media Coverage (pdf - 13 mb)

H. ARB Agricultural Burn Decisions (pdf - 255 kb)

Additional Web-based Information regarding the 2008 Northern California Wildfires (not part of official documentation)

California Exceptional Events - Youtube.

2008 Lightning Siege Overview. California Department of Forestry and Fire Prevention.

California Wildfires June 2008

California Wildfires. NOAA Goddard Earth Sciences, Data and Information Services Center

Fires in California. NASA Earth Observatory.

Summer 2008 California wildfires. Wikipedia.

California Wildfires 2008 Aftermath. University Business Magazine.

- Part 1
- Part 2

Northern California Fire Updates. About.com: San Francisco.

Contact Information

Comments and questions regarding this subject may be sent to:

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Data and Statistics

The Board is one of six boards, departments, and offices under the umbrella of the California Environmental Protection Agency.
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