

Drought conditions make bad air worse



Smoke from the Washington Fire filled the Lake Tahoe Basin last week.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Sammy Caiola, Sacramento Bee

A longtime asthma sufferer, Shirley Bittante tries to stay inside when the air district rates conditions outside her Fair Oaks house as “unhealthy.” She may have to spend more time indoors this summer as heat and drought degrade air quality across the state.

Bittante, 60, said she’s noticed more dust and fumes in the air in recent years. More fallow farmland, more forest fires, stagnant air and other factors aggravated by the state’s record four-year drought have spiked annual particle concentrations in Sacramento and other cities, creating an especially difficult environment for people with respiratory illnesses.

“I don’t have to physically see the smog. I just know it’s bad,” she said. “When you live with it every day, you get so used to it – the congestion and the coughing ... I don’t see any end in sight.”

Particle pollution has increased in 25 California counties, where the number of unhealthy particle days has nearly tripled since 2014, according to the American Lung Association's 2015 State of the Air report released in April. Statewide, 28 million people live in counties that received a failing grade for air quality, making up 73 percent of the state's population.

Read the whole story