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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE SERVICES ADMINISTRATION Weather Bureau

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Experimental Air Quality Forecasts in the Sacramento Valley

NORMAN S. BENES

Western Region

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SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

August 1970



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A western Indian symbol for rain. It also symbolizes man's dependence on weather and environment in the West.

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Weather Bureau Technical Memorandum WR-53

EXPERIMENTAL AIR QUALITY FORECASTS IN THE SACRAMENTO VALLEY

Norman S. Benes Principal Assistant WBO, Sacramento, California



WESTERN REGION TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM NO. 53

SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH AUGUST 1970

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FIGURE 1

Map of the Sacramento Valley of Northern California, showing 2000-foot contours and visibility-reporting stations.

FIGURE 2a

WBAN-10A for Sacramento WBAS - showing very good visibility on October 30, 1967.

FIGURE 2b

WBAN-10A for Sacramento WBAS - showing reduction on visibility as the mixing height lowered on October 31, 1967.

FIGURE 3a

Oakland, 4:00 a.m., October 31, 1967, upper-air sounding mixing height depicted using Sacramento WBAS actual maximum temperature

FIGURE 3b

Oakland, 4:00 p.m. Upper-air sounding twelve hours after Figure 3a, using Sacramento WBAS actual maximum temperature; note how mixing height lowered.

FIGURE 4

California Air Basins, as adopted by California Air Resources Board. Note that the Sacramento Valley Air Basin includes Northern Sierra Nevada.

FIGURE 5

Comparison of Oakland and Chico upper-air soundings, four hours apart; Chico warmer lower layers, colder upper layers.

FIGURE 6

Forecast Form - the worksheet used in preparing Ventilation Index forecast.

FIGURE 7

Objective Maximum Temperature Scheme (Zimmerman, 1959) - Used for maximum temperature prediction.

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EXPERIMENTAL AIR QUALITY FORECASTS IN THE SACRAMENTO VALLEY

INTRODUCTION

About 400,000 acres of rice are harvested annually in the Sacramento Valley (see Figure 1). The disposal of straw and rubble residue after harvest presents a problem of large proportions to the rice grower. Historically, burning of this straw has been the most efficient means of disposal. With steady urban encroachment into the agriculturally productive areas of California, a tolerance limit is fast approaching regarding acceptable air quality standards. Dr. Douglas H. K. Lee (1963) listed 13 atmospheric factors affecting man; among them were smoke and dust.

Rice-straw burning generally produces a highly visible smoke. With sufficient acreage afire under certain atmospheric conditions, this smoke may interfere with many human urban and suburban pursuits. Principally affected is horizontal visibility, an aesthetical variable especially important in this location. The California State Forester, Francis Raymond, commented (1967), "Sacramento city is currently being 'scourged' daily with smoke from burning rice stubble. Outcries demanding control of this air pollution are in each daily paper." This remark was triggered by the rapid deterioration in visibility from one day to the next as shown in Figures 2a and 2b. Figures 3a and 3b show that a decrease in mixing height on the 31st was associated with the decrease in visibility. In the middle of 1968, representatives of the agricultural community in the Sacramento Valley contacted the Sacramento Weather Bureau Office regarding the possibility of providing a weather forecast that would enable them to dispose of their agricultural wastes by burning and still maintain a socially acceptable level of air quality.

During the "twilight" period before the Air Resources Board set air quality standards for California, concern was felt by the rice growers regarding the impact that their farming practices might have on a wellpublicized, and at times somewhat emotional, issue. At the time of their request for aid from our Sacramento Weather Bureau Office, it was pointed out that Weather Bureau forecast information would be advisory only. The State Air Resources Board (ARB), under provisions of the Mulford-Carrell Act (1967), was empowered to establish air basins throughout the state (see Figure 4). One of these basins is, essentially, the Sacramento Valley. However, in that same act, individual counties within the air basins retained the right to establish their own air pollution control district (APCD). In addition to the San Francisco APCD and the Los Angeles APCD, almost one-half of the state's counties have formed their own APCDs.

Sacramento County was reported by NACORF (1967) to have a 1965 expenditure of 5.6¢ per capita for air pollution control, compared to 60.8¢ per capita for Los Angeles County and 31.8¢ per capita for the San

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Francisco Bay Area. This means that more than three and one-half million dollars for Los Angeles County, a little over one million dollars for the San Francisco Bay Area, but only twenty-eight thousand dollars for Sacramento County were spent in 1965 for air pollution control. The NACORF report does not list any areas in the United States spending less than five thousand dollars annually.

Air pollution potential (APP) forecasts are available via national teletype. The nearest locality to Sacramento for which a forecast is made is Oakland in the San Francisco Bay Area. However, the San Francisco APCD (1968) does not rely on APP forecasts for their regulatory activities concerning agricultural waste disposal by burning, as they are not detailed enough. Consequently, they have established procedures based on a local temperature-inversion climatology. A minimum requirement of 2500-feet vertical mixing (to the base of the inversion) is considered adequate, provided that there is a 7.5 degree centigrade temperature decrease in that layer from the ground to 2500 feet. In the fall of 1968 and 1969, the National Meteorological Center (NMC) mixing-height forecasts for Oakland showed a bias toward higher values with time. Forecasts for "tomorrow afternoon" were higher about 80 percent of the time than forecasts for "this afternoon". Data compiled for the Sacramento Valley by the Sacramento Weather Bureau Office, using Oakland radiosonde data and valley maximum temperatures. indicated that in the autumn of 1968, mixing heights were the same or higher the next afternoon 45 percent of the time and lower 55 percent of the time. In autumn 1969, mixing heights for the next afternoon were the same or higher 56 percent of the time and lower 44 percent of the time.

In response to pollution problems in the Willamette Valley of Oregon, Bates and Chilcote (1969) derived a regression equation that provides the approximate number of acres of agricultural waste that can be burned before visibility at a control point (Eugene) is reduced to a prescribed value, six miles. Variables used were 850-millibar wind speed and direction at Salem and 7:00 a.m. visibility at Eugene. Smoke management advisories were recently inaugurated in Oregon as aids in critical silviculture operations.

PROCEDURES

The Sacramento Weather Bureau Office approach was to generate a rather easily understood forecast that would enable the decision maker (the agriculturist) to choose from his options, whether to burn and how much to burn, in a manner that will produce the least particulate matter concentration in lower levels of the atmosphere. The forecast ability of the atmosphere to diffuse pollutants was called the "Ventilation Index". Panofsky (1969) states that the concentration of pollutants is inversely proportional to V x D, the "Ventilation Factor", where V is the average wind speed in the mixed layer D. The Sacramento Valley is similar to a large box canyon, easily trapping pollutants. However, with sufficient vertical lifting and sufficient horizontal wind movement, pollutants can be dispersed. A measure of atmospheric stability is obtained from the early morning Oakland radiosonde. Lower-level mean winds are transmitted on the preliminary raob report and provide the mean speed from the surface to five thousand feet, and from five thousand feet to ten thousand feet. Sacramento WBO used the former. Wind speeds in the valley south of Sacramento were obtained from a television broadcasting tower at Walnut Grove via a telephone call to the duty engineer at about 5:00 a.m. Wind speed there is measured near the 600-foot level and near the top, 1500 feet.

Knowledge of low-level, lower Sacramento Valley wind speeds provides the forecaster with more confidence as to existing conditions when extrapolating the Oakland surface to 5000-foot winds into the entire Sacramento Valley during the preparation of air pollution forecasts. Pibal observations taken at 1800 GMT at the Sacramento Executive Airport were used as input for possible forecast revision in the noon release via direct radio broadcasts. This noon forecast includes an "outlook" for ventilation conditions expected the next afternoon. The U. S. Air Force has a weather detachment at Chico, California, which takes some radiosonde observations in support of the Air Force's high-altitude. balloon-borne soundings released there. Prior to Sacramento WBO's first ventilation forecast season (autumn 1968), all Chico flights that were launched in the early morning during October 1967 were obtained and compared with Oakland 1200 GMT flights for the same day. The comparison indicated that the observations were similar enough to use the Oakland sounding in an experimental forecast program (see Figure 5).

Since visibility was used as the measure of air quality, the aid of several cooperators was obtained in reporting the 4 p.m. visibility at Biggs, Willows, Woodland, Arbuckle, and Davis (see Figure 1). In addition, hourly visibility reports were available from the following aviation weather-reporting stations in the Sacramento Valley: Redding (RDD), Chico (CIC), Red Bluff (RBL), Beale Air Force Base (BAB), Marysville (MYV), Sacramento Metropolitan Field (SMF), Sacramento Executive Airport (SAC), McClellan Air Force Base (MCC), Mather Air Force Base (MHR), and Travis Air Force Base (SUU). Cooperators were supplied with charts indicating prominent landmarks at known distances, and arrangements were made to have their observations telephoned to Sacramento WBO each afternoon. This would, ordinarily, be the time of day that maximum ventilation through mixing should occur. These observations would also indicate the accuracy of forecasts distributed via radio broadcast at 6:30 a.m. that morning. Holzworth (1961) concluded that visibility data can be an important source of information in the evaluation of air pollution problems.

Two work sheets were used by the Sacramento WBO forecaster: one was the forecast form (Figure 6), the other was a portion of a large pseudoadiabatic diagram (Figure 5). On the pseudoadiabatic chart, 850- and 700-mb mandatory level data, mean-layer winds and significant

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level data to 700 mbs were plotted. After forecasts of representative maximum temperatures for the southern and northern halves of the valley had been made, the mixing height was determined by following the dry adiabat from its point at the surface corresponding to the forecast maximum temperature up to its intersection with the observed free-air temperature curve. An objective maximum-temperature forecasting aid based on the 850-mb temperature at 1200 GMT and the Travis AFB surface wind speed and direction at 1500 GMT was used, but modified to fit operational time requirements (see Figure 7).

The formula used for the Ventilation Index (VI) is:

VI equals MH times \overline{WS}

where MH is the mixing height (hundreds of feet) based on the forecast maximum temperature and \overline{WS} is the forecast average wind speed in knots through the mixed layer. In the first season, late September - early December of 1968, the numerical ventilation categories were labeled as shown in Table 1:

TABLE I - VENTILATION CATEGORIES

Ventilation Index (VI)	Category
> 600	Excellent
401 - 600	Good
181 - 400	Fair
< 180	Poor

Miller (1968) reported that the average mixing depth for the Sacramento Valley in October was a relatively low value of 3000 feet. This was the next to the lowest value of the four seasons sampled; therefore, it was considered more appropriate to label the best ventilating conditions something other than "Excellent", particularly when used in one of the poorer seasons. In 1969, the label for the best ventilation category was changed from "Excellent" to "Very Good".

During the 1968 and 1969 seasons, forecasts were made daily except Sunday in fall and early winter, but verification data were not available on all days. Distribution of forecasts according to category is given in Table II:

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TABLE II - VENTILATION FORECASTS

Category	1968	1969
Excellent (Very Good)	0	7
Good	8	10
Fair	25	15
Poor	13	28
Tota1	48	60

These forecasts were based on forecast mean wind speed through the mixing height stratum and forecast mixing height. The latter is a function of the observed temperature lapse rate and the forecast surface maximum temperature. In the two seasons, maximum-temperature forecasts were just a little more than two degrees in error on the average. However, the average mixing height forecast was in error by almost 1000 feet.

In the list of criteria proposed by the California Air Resources Board, the following conditions are considered to exceed (be worse than) the air quality standard: Relative humidity less than 70 percent, and two successive observations one hour apart indicating visibility 7.5 miles or less occurring on seven or more days in a 90-day period or on three or more consecutive days. Data from Sacramento Executive Airport show that this standard was not met in the 1969 season. From the 22nd of September through the 6th of December, 32 of the 75 days were below proposed standards. Every day that showed two successive observations one hour apart with visibility 7 miles or less and relative humidity less than 70 percent was counted; from the 21st of November through the 6th of December, this was a daily occurrence. During most of this latter period, the Sacramento Valley was included in the area forecast by the Washington National Meteorological Center to have high air pollution potential. A comparison of two categories of visibility (six miles less, and less than three miles) for November 1969 proved interesting when arrayed against a ten-year November record, 1951-1960, for the Sacramento Executive Airport, as shown in Table 3.

TABLE III - OBSERVED VISIBILITY CATEGORIES

	November 1951-1960 Average	November 1969
Less than 3 miles	101	84
6 miles and less	302	343

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Thus, November 1969 conditions were not grossly different from normal conditions. Data from hourly observations were used in the comparison.

Verification by category of forecast, i.e., "Poor", "Fair", "Good", or "Excellent" (Very Good) for the 1968 and 1969 fall seasons is given in Table 4. The 0000GMT Oakland radiosonde data was used in the verification, assuming that it represented afternoon low atmospheric structure in the Sacramento Valley. The Oakland observed lapse rate and Sacramento observed maximum temperature were used to determine the mixing depth. Oakland winds aloft were then used to compute the mean-layer wind speed through the mixing depth. This speed was then assumed to be representative of the Sacramento Valley.

It may be seen that verification was good, with 59/96 or 62% of the forecasts in the correct category for combined data and 80/96 or 83% within one category of being correct.

Informal verification was obtained also through aircraft flights during the 1968 season. Several flights were made by University of California Agricultural Extension Service personnel to assess the degree of cooperation on the part of the user (rice grower) and as a check on Weather Bureau forecasts, the 6:35 a.m. forecast broadcast through commercial radio being closely monitored. Through personal communication, the Sacramento WBO learned that its forecasts were judged to be highly satisfactory.

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CONCLUSIONS

In response to a request from private citizens, the Sacramento Weather Bureau Office initiated an advisory air quality forecast program based on a "ventilating index" concept. Forecast terminology was kept simple, as was the method of forecast preparation. Decisions regarding management of agricultural waste disposal were incumbent upon the forecast user. Wind observations from a TV tower in the valley were used and a temporary meso-scale network of visibility observing stations was set up. This satisfied, in part, recommendation of the Meteorology Panel, United States Technical Conference on Air Pollution (1950), and Recommendation Al of an American Chemical Society Subcommittee on Environmental Improvement (1969) regarding low-level winds, more dense observation sites, and general measurement of the atmosphere's turbidity. Information to date indicates that the Sacramento WBO program was successful.

The simple methods used in arriving at an estimation of atmospheric ventilating qualities presented here may not suffice for the more complex future requirements. When legal constraints are added to strict California Air Resource Board ambient air quality standards, more pertinent data may be required than that used in this experiment.

Smaller scale wind observing networks and low-level temperature soundings in the Sacramento Valley will undoubtedly be required.

TABLE IV

VENTILATION INDEX FORECAST VERIFICATION BY CATEGORY P-Poor; F-Fair; G-Good; E-Excellent. E(1968) equals VG(1969)

1968 OBSERVED

1969 OBSERVED

		Р	F	G	E	<u>Total</u>			P	F	G	VG	Tota1
F							F						
0	P	8	2	0	2	12	0	Р	19	4	0	0	23
R							R						
Е	F	4	14	3	4	25	E	F	2	8	2	2	14
С							C						
А	G	2	3	1	0	6	А	G	1	3	2	1	7
S				÷ 1			S						
Т	Е	0	0	1	1	2	Т	VG	_0	1	1	б	8
Tot	tal	14	19	5	7	45	Co	otal	22	16	5	9	52

1968-1969 COMBINED

1968-1969 COMBINED OBSERVED PERCENT

		Р	F	G	E,VC	F Total				Р	F	G	E,VG
F								F		· · ·			
0	Ρ	27	6	0	2	35		0	Ρ	77	17	0	6
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Ε	F	6	22	5	6	39		Е	F	15	56	14	15
С								C					
А	G	3	6	3	1	13		A	G	23	46	23	8
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Т	E,VG	0	1	2	7	10	· ·	т	E,VG	0	11	11	78
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Τo	tal ·	36	35	10	16	97							

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT: Mr. James R. Miller, Meteorologist in Charge; and Mr. David I. Wise, Agricultural Forecaster, deserve most of the credit for initiating and designing the working features of this program.

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		R	16:	1/2	X	1/2	1/2	R	18:	68	48	00	00	—[04	RO2VV11/2 K8 RO2VV1/2+ K8	$-\frac{1}{1}$	52
		R	18	ź.	X	11/2	13		132	64	46	26	03	K	106	ROZVV1/2+ K7 608		
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STATE OF CALIFORNIA AIR BASINS





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WBO, Sacramento, California

Date: _____

The atmospheric ventilation forecast for agricultural operations in the Sacramento Valley indicates that this afternoon conditions will be:

(6:30 AM)

(Noon)

The outlook for tomorrow afternoon indicates the atmospheric ventilation conditions will be (the same) (better) (worse).

					<u></u>	AKLAN	ID 122 1	RAOB DATA			
Low	er Inver	sion			U	pper	Inv/Isc	othermal			
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Тор		Ft. 1	MSL		Т	op _		Ft. MSL	SAC	850 Mb. Te	emp(Est
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		Speed &	Dir	Fcs	t Obs	Fcs	st T (Dbsr T	Mixg Laye	r Index	* nating
	Sutter B		·	<u></u>		. <u>_</u>			<u> </u>		
<u>S. 1</u>	Sutter B		ation	l Index			Height.	in 1001 x	. Mean Wind	in Knots	<u>I</u>
Vent	<u>tilation</u>					-	-	401-600		TH MICOG	
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				3			WIND DA	TA			
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PM		J	1	l			L	L	I	L	
					1	VISIE	BILITY B	REPORTS			
			SAC	SMF	MYV	RBL	BIGGS	WILLOWS	WILLIAMS	WOODLAND	ARBUCKLE
		Sunrise					х	X	X	X	X
	•	lo AM					х	x	x	X	x
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	<u>1</u>	, PM									
	5	Sunset					х	X	X	х	X



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- No. 51 Western Region Sea State and Surf Forecaster's Manual. Gordon C. Shields and Gerald B. Burdwell. July 1970. (PB-193 102)
- No. 52 Sacramento Weather Radar Climatology. R. G. Pappas and C. M. Veliquette, July 1970.

* Out of Print

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