

AIR POLLUTION

✓ Local smog situation might be health hazard

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4-14-82

SANTA CRUZ — Unhealthy levels of air pollution were detected at the Live Oak monitoring station twice last year, the first time since 1985.

And when monitors are installed soon in Scotts Valley and Watsonville, the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District expects smog will be detected more often here.

One or two days of air pollution might not worry a healthy adult, but it should. Researchers are finding that a series of short-term exposures over a lifetime could be health threatening, said Bill Sessa of the state Air Quality Control Board. •

Recent research on the long-term effects of smog on Los Angeles residents show that the damage from short-term exposure never goes away.

"One researcher equated it to sunburn," Sessa said. "It goes

away, but with each successive exposure, it gets worse."

Because everyone doesn't respond the same to air pollution, the state's standards for air quality are designed to protect those most vulnerable to the debilitating effects of smog, said Sessa.

These include young children, the elderly, those with heart disease, and people with respiratory problems.

Young children are at risk, he said, because they have developing respiratory systems and spend a lot of time outside. As they run around, they tend to breathe through their mouths, bringing polluted air quickly to their lungs.

The elderly can't fight air pollution because of the weakening of immune systems that happens naturally with age, he continued.

"What might be a minor irritation from a level of pollution on a middle-age, rigorous, healthy adult can be a life-threatening situation for someone else," said Sessa.