

Connecting with Nature on Fiscalini Ranch Preserve: Check the Air Quality First



By KITTY CONNOLLY, Executive Director, Friends of the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve (fiscaliniranchpreserve.org)

Wondering exactly how bad the air is these days? Frantically checking several air-quality sites a day, but puzzled by why they do not tell the same story? It may depend on the source.

In our area, ozone and airborne particulates 10 microns or less (PM₁₀) in size and the subset of particles that are 2.5 microns or less (PM_{2.5}) are measured. The Air Quality Index (AQI) reports the highest level of pollutants being measured, meaning the pollutant that is most dangerous to human health. So, if the readings are for 280 PM_{2.5} and 40 ozone, the AQI will be 280.

Cambria's nearest regulatory-grade air quality monitoring station is in Morro Bay. California Air Resources Control Board maintains that station and its data is used by the Air Pollution Control District of San Luis Obispo County's slocleanair.org. Other nearby stations include San Luis Obispo, Atascadero, Paso Robles, and Big Sur Ranger Station. The Forest Service also places temporary monitors in locations where wildfires are an issue.

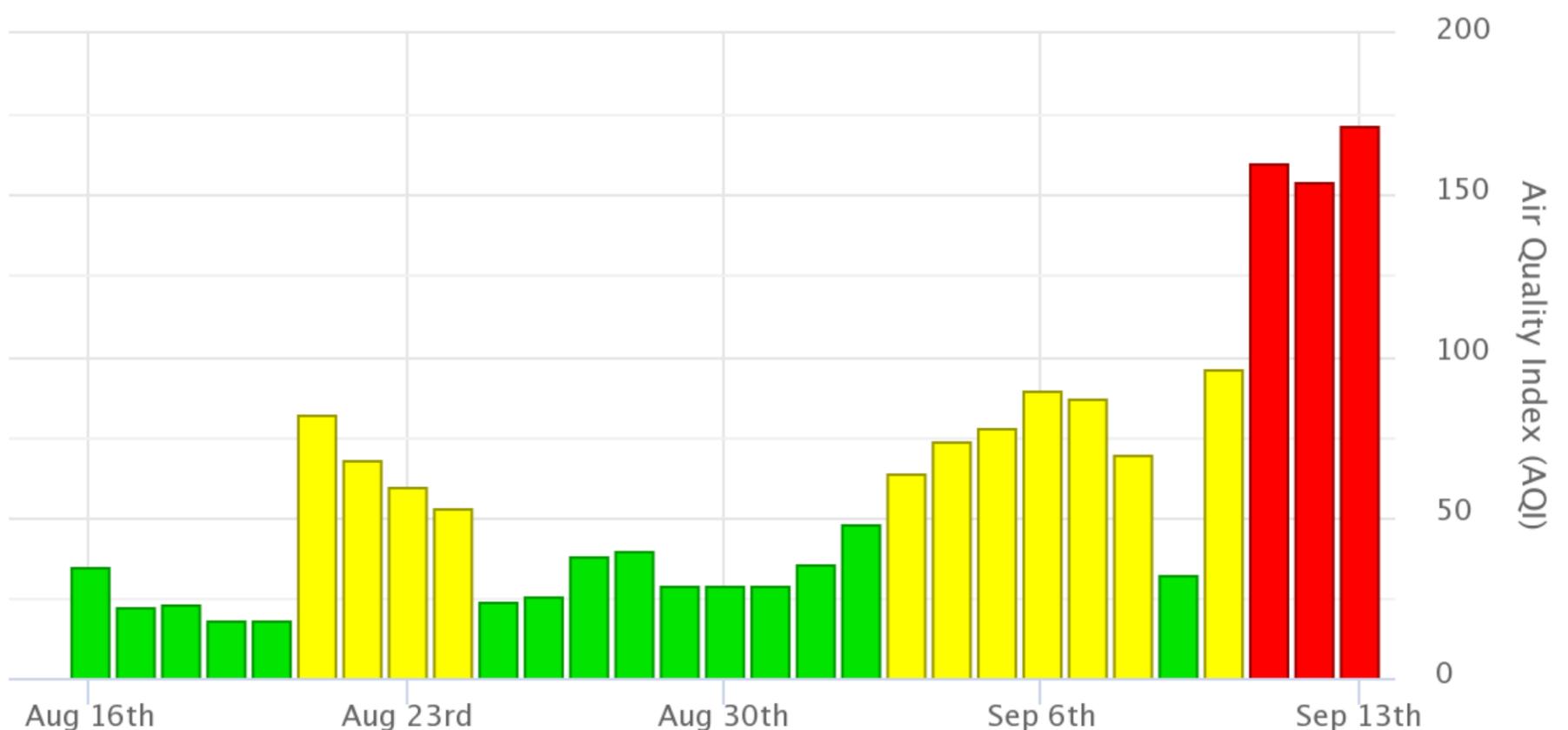
The downside to these official monitors, either permanent or temporary, is that they do not produce fine scale reports. At best, they report on an hourly basis and the AQI forecast is a daily prediction that does not hint at fluctuates during the day. The official monitors can also be fairly far from your current location.

For instant, local air quality reporting, people turn to commercial products installed by homeowners. There is no assurance that these low-cost monitors, including PurpleAir, have been correctly installed, calibrated, or located so the data they produce is not as reliable as the official stations. On the other hand, they complement the network of official monitoring stations.

In fact, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's website, www.airnow.gov, began reporting commercial monitoring data alongside official stations this August to give a fuller picture of the air quality situation. Data from commercial monitors is adjusted to bring it in line with data from the official stations. Together, they blanket the state, although they are still sparse in the Cambria area with only one nearby commercial station reporting from Cayucos. **Fire.airnow.gov** adds in even more information to complete the report.

There is growing evidence that exposure to the tiniest particles, PM_{2.5}, can increase the severity of the covid-19 illness so be careful. Most days, exercise on the Ranch is healthy for mind and body, when the air is unhealthy, please stay at indoors. On those days, we hope **not** to see you on the Ranch.

Morro Bay Reporting Area



This chart from airnow.gov (under Recent Trends) shows the air quality index at the Morro Bay station over the month ending Sept 13. The Dolan Fire began August 18.