Wildfires and Smoke

Reducing Health Effects of Wildfire Smoke

Wildfires and severe smoke can create dangerous conditions for people, especially those with chronic health conditions. Learn about current wildfires, wildfire smoke conditions, and what you can do to reduce the health effects of wildfire smoke.

Wildfires in Oregon

- Oregon Smoke Information blog - Get the latest air quality infromation from Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and learn if there is a health advisory in your community.

- InciWeb (Incident Information System) - State-by-state wildfire public information and other updates.

- Northwest Coordinator Center - Updates on resource coordination and logistics support across Oregon agencies.

- Oregon Department of Forestry - Learn what ODF is doing to meet major wildfire threats in the state.

Health threats from wildfire smoke

Smoke from wildfires is a mixture of gases and fine particles from burning trees and other plant materials. Smoke can hurt your eyes, irritate your respiratory system, and worsen chronic heart and lung diseases.

Know if you are at risk

- If you have heart or lung disease, such as congestive heart failure, angina, COPD, emphysema or asthma, you are at higher risk of having health problems from smoke.
- Older adults are more likely to be affected by smoke, possibly because they are more likely to have heart or lung diseases than younger people.

- Children are more likely to be affected by health threats from smoke because their airways are still developing and because they breathe more air per pound of body weight than adults. Children also are more likely to be active outdoors.

Recommendations for people with chronic diseases

- Have an adequate supply of medication (more than five days).
- If you have asthma, make sure you have a written asthma management plan.
- If you have heart disease, check with your health care providers about precautions to take during smoke events.
- If you plan to use a portable air cleaner, buy one that matches the room size specified by the manufacturer.
- Call your health care provider if your condition gets worse when you are exposed to smoke.

Recommendations for everyone: Limit your exposure to smoke

- **Pay attention to local air quality reports**.
  Listen and watch for news or health warnings about smoke. Find out if your community provides reports about the Environmental Protection Agency's Air Quality Index (AQI). Also pay attention to public health messages about taking additional safety measures.
- **Refer to visibility guides if they are available**.
  Not every community has a monitor that measures the amount of particles that are in the air. In the Western part of the United States, some communities have guidelines to help people estimate the Air Quality Index (AQI) based on how far they can see.
- **If you are advised to stay indoors, keep indoor air as clean as possible**.
  Keep windows and doors closed unless it is extremely hot outside. Run an air conditioner if you have one, but keep the fresh air intake closed and the filter clean to prevent outdoor smoke from getting inside. If you do not have an air conditioner and it is too warm to stay inside with the windows closed, seek shelter elsewhere.
- **Do not add to indoor pollution**.
  When smoke levels are high, do not use anything that burns, such as candles, fireplaces, or gas stoves. Do not vacuum, because vacuuming stirs up particles already inside your home. Do not smoke, because smoking puts even more pollution into the air.
- **Do not rely on dust masks for protection**.
  Paper "comfort" or "dust" masks commonly found at hardware stores are designed to trap large particles, such as sawdust. These masks will not protect your lungs from smoke. An "N95" mask, *properly worn*, will offer some protection. For more information about effective masks, see the Respirator Fact Sheet provided by CDC's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.