

It's wildfire season: What you need to know about air quality

July 8, 2020



It's fire season, and if wildfires occur locally, smoke is likely to be a problem.

With that in mind, the North Coast Unified Air Quality Management District, in coordination with the Humboldt, Del Norte and Trinity County Public Health and regional Tribal Health Departments, has issued an advisory to help people know the best way to deal with smoke, including how to understand the criteria for air quality notifications.

Air Quality Alerts are the most serious notifications issued by the NCUAQMD. Alerts indicate when the air in an area becomes hazardous. If you live in or plan to travel in an area that may be affected by wildfire smoke, check for alerts online at www.ncuaqmd.org or by calling 1-866-BURN-DAY (1-866-287-6329). Air Quality Alerts and information about how smoke affects you and your family can also be found on the website.

Air Quality Advisories are issued when an area is forecast to be impacted by a substantial smoke event and becomes unhealthy. The impact of smoke in the area is not expected to reach the “hazardous” level.

Public Service Announcements are issued to provide information about possible air quality affects from Wildfires. Public service announcements are intended to provide general information about the smoke event. Sensitive populations may be affected by smoke at this level. The impact of smoke in the area is not expected to reach “unhealthy” or “hazardous” levels.

If you have health concerns, are elderly, pregnant, or have a child in your care, consider talking with your doctor now about what to do if the air becomes smoky.

Concentrations of smoke will vary depending upon location, weather, and distance to the fire. Smoke from wildfires and structure fires contain harmful chemicals that can affect your health. Smoke can cause eye and throat irritation, coughing, and difficulty breathing.

If you are in a wildfire prone area, consider buying an air purifier now to use in the event of smoky air. Some air cleaners can help reduce indoor pollutants if they are the right type and size for your home. Go to www.epa.gov/iaq/pubs/residair.html for more information about air cleaners or air purifiers.

For more information call the NCUAQMD at 707-443-3093 or the Del Norte Public Health Department at 707-464-3191.

Health Information for Smoke Impacts

Concentrations of smoke may vary depending upon location, weather, and distance from the fire. Smoke from wildfires and structure fires contain harmful chemicals that can affect your health. Smoke can cause eye and throat irritation, coughing, and difficulty breathing. People who are at greatest risk of experiencing symptoms due to smoke include those with respiratory disease (such as asthma), those with heart disease, young children and older adults.

These sensitive populations should stay indoors and avoid prolonged activity. All others should limit prolonged or heavy activity and time spent outdoors. Even healthy adults can be affected by smoke. Seek medical help if you have symptoms that worsen or become severe.

If you can see, taste, or feel smoke, contact your local health department and/or primary healthcare provider. This is especially important if you have health concerns, are elderly, are pregnant, or have a child in your care.

Follow these general precautions to protect your health during a smoke event:

- Minimize or stop outdoor activities, especially exercise.
- Stay indoors with windows and doors closed as much as possible.
- Do not run fans that bring smoky outdoor air inside – examples include swamp coolers, whole-house fans, and fresh air ventilation systems.

- Run your air-conditioner only if it does not bring smoke in from the outdoors. Change the standard air conditioner filter to a medium or high efficiency filter. If available, use the “re-circulate” or “recycle” setting on the unit.
- Do not smoke, fry food, or do other things that will create indoor air pollution.

If you have lung disease (including asthma) or heart disease, closely monitor your health and contact your doctor if you have symptoms that worsen.

Consider leaving the area until smoke conditions improve if you have repeated coughing, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, wheezing, chest tightness or pain, palpitations, nausea, unusual fatigue, lightheadedness.