

August 2014

Emergency Preparedness Pointers

Smoke From A Distant Fire

So far this year, the wildfire season has not been as intense as other years in Idaho. Still, smoke from fires in Oregon, Washington and Canada have created a haze over the Treasure Valley. Fires do not need to be burning near our community for the impacts of smoke to create health concerns. The parts of the population that may be the most at risk from wildfire smoke exposure include: young children (age 7 or younger), older adults (age 65 or older), pregnant women and people with pre-existing lung or heart conditions. For a look at current smoke conditions go to the real-time Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) air quality map online at :

<http://airquality.deq.idaho.gov/>

Very healthy, active, outdoor people can still have a smoke sensitivity. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) wildfire smoke can cause:

- Coughing
- Scratchy throat
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Headaches
- Stinging eyes
- Fatigue
- Irritated sinuses

Take Action To Stay Healthy

As always, the first step is to be aware of what is happening and what could happen. The DEQ air quality map along with current news reports will provide up to date information on regional conditions. Additionally, it is a good idea to monitor the current wildland fires burning in the region. Below are two more websites that provide wildfire information:

<http://www.wildlandfires.info/p/great-basin.html> and <http://inciweb.nwcg.gov/>

The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare recommends the following ways to reduce exposure and minimize the associated health risks when there are high smoke levels in the air.

- If you are advised to stay indoors, keep indoor air as clean as possible. Keep windows and doors closed. Run a filtered 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, seek shelter elsewhere. For example, go to a local mall, movie theater or library.
- Do not add to indoor pollution. 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.
- Try to limit outdoor activities that add to poor air quality. For example, do not burn wood or other materials that will add smoke to the air. Try to limit using gas lawnmowers and driving your car during poor air quality days. Consider taking the bus or carpooling to limit air pollution.
- Stay well-hydrated by drinking plenty of water. Staying hydrated helps dilute phlegm in the respiratory tract making it easier to cough smoke particles out. Plan on coughing, it is nature's way of clearing your lungs. Avoid caffeine products, sugary drinks and alcohol as they have a dehydrating effect.
- Avoid outdoor exercise or other strenuous activities on poor air quality days. Both adults and children should limit outdoor activities when smoke levels are a concern.
- Follow your doctor's advice about medicines and about your respiratory management plan if you have asthma or another lung disease. Keep at least a 5-day supply of medications on hand. If you wear contact lenses, switch to eyeglasses in a smoky environment.
- Do not rely on dust masks for protection. Paper "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 ([surgical respirator](#)), properly worn, will offer some protection.

For more information on the hazards of wildfire smoke and precautionary actions, click on the links below:

[IdahoHealthAndWelfare/WildfireSmoke](#)

or

[CDCWildfireFacts](#)



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