

Sutter County Public Health

Website Info

Posted: 7/7/2017

Wildfire Smoke is a Health Hazard Protect People at Risk

Smoke from wildfires is a frequent experience in Northern California that presents a known health hazard. Wildfire smoke contains irritants, “particulate matter” (PM) and ozone (aka “smog”). Very small PM and irritants can enter deep into the lungs and cause health problems, even in small amounts. It is important to know what to do when wildfire smoke is in the air to reduce the exposure to wildfire smoke and the risk of adverse effects on health.

Healthy people can be affected by wildfire smoke, but some groups are especially vulnerable to the irritants, PM, and ozone in smoke, such as people with heart, lung disease or diabetes, older adults, pregnant women, children and teens. Smoke can irritate the eyes and airways, causing coughing, a scratchy throat, irritated sinuses, headaches, stinging eyes or a runny nose. People with cardiovascular diseases, like coronary heart disease, high blood pressure or other vascular disease, are more likely to have a heart attack or other illness in smoky conditions. People with lung problems, like asthma or emphysema, are more likely to have their condition aggravated. Children’s developing lungs are more vulnerable to the bad effects of smoke and very small PM.

Here are some specific strategies to reduce risk when you can see smoke or smell smoke in the air:

- Stay indoors; set indoor and car air conditioning to re-circulate; avoid using a whole-house fan or a swamp cooler.
- Reduce activity, especially outdoor physical activity, during times when air quality is reduced.
- Avoid adding other sources of indoor air pollution, such as tobacco smoke, heating with wood stoves, frying or broiling foods, vacuuming, and using paints, solvents, or adhesives.
- Children, pregnant women, older adults, and people with respiratory or heart conditions should be particularly careful to avoid unnecessary exposure to smoke.
- People with asthma, heart or other lung conditions should follow their healthcare plans carefully; if your symptoms start getting worse, contact your doctor as soon as possible.
- Cloth and ordinary face masks do not provide any protection against the hazardous very small particles in wildfire or wood smoke. Well-fitted dust masks

or “N95” respirators may provide some protection if exposure is unavoidable, but are much less effective protection than limiting activity and smoke exposure. People with health conditions may not be able to use masks or respirators – check with your doctor first.

- Pay attention to air quality advisories and the recommended protective measures for the day’s air quality level for your health status.
- You can sign up for local air quality reports by email or text message from the Feather River Air Quality Management District website at www.fraqmd.org

It is important to remember that smoke density can vary with the time of day and from one local area to another and to use common sense precautions when you can see or smell smoke.

- Guide to estimating level of smoke in the air and decisions about taking precautions to protect lungs:

The Feather River Air Quality Management District (FRAQMD) is the local air district for Sutter and Yuba Counties. The FRAQMD office provides current air quality levels as well as issues advisories when air quality conditions may be impacted by wildfires. You can sign up for email or text message air quality forecasts and alerts on the FRAQMD website at [http://www.fraqmd.org/](http://www.fraqmd.org) or for more information you can call FRAQMD at (530) 634-7659.

For current information about Air Quality and Wildfire Smoke:

- Feather River Air Quality Management District. www.fraqmd.org
- California Smoke Blog. <http://californiasmokeinfo.blogspot.com/>

For more information about wildfire smoke and its health effects:

- The American Lung Association. Healthy Air and Wildfires webpage: <http://www.lung.org/our-initiatives/healthy-air/outdoor/emergencies-and-natural-disasters/wildfires.html>
- United States Environmental Protection Agency’s website, AirNow: <https://airnow.gov/index.cfm?action=smoke.index>

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