

## Smoke Health Advisory for Upper Ojai Residents

**Date:** December 22, 2017  
**To:** Ojai Residents  
**From:** Robert Levin, MD, Ventura County Public Health Officer  
**Subject:** Upper Ojai Oil Seeps

In addition to the ash and smoke from the Thomas Fire, additional smoke from some thirty burning oil seeps are contributing to the air quality concerns in Upper Ojai. Burning oil seeps contain such substances as benzene, toluene, ethyl benzene and xylenes (BTEX) in addition to a complicated mixture of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH). Nearby residents have rightly questioned whether such substances are potentially injurious to their health.

In the long run the burn-off products of smoke might cause an increased risk of cancer and in the short run there could be cardiac and respiratory effects. Recent air testing of three sites near the areas of these burning seeps for BTEX have revealed quantities of these four substances that are greater than baseline but lower than shelter in place levels. One of these samples was collected ten feet from a plume near its site of origin at a burning seep. Another was collected on Big Canyon and a third from Thomas Aquinas College. Results from additional BTEX testing should soon be available. Due to expected delays in receiving the materials needed, and the laboratory turn-around time to test PAH levels, the earliest these results might be known is three weeks.

There is no mask that is commonly available, affordable and comfortable that can remove all the constituents of the smoke that is arising from the burning oil seeps. Ventura County Public Health is also making P95 masks available after being requested to do so from members of the community but is not endorsing them for the above stated reason. N95 and P95 masks do a good job of filtering out ash and many of the elements in smoke, but they do not filter out vapors. BTEX and PAH are vapors.

Based on my review of the situation, I would rely on respirators (masks) to lessen the impact of ash and smoke. I would avoid being outside if I smelled an odor I thought might be from the burning seeps. I would stay inside with the doors and windows closed. If you feel that your home is doing a good job of preventing the burning oil smell from getting inside, then staying in your house would not be unreasonable. If the odor is entering your home, then you should consider leaving. As part of your decision-making process, keep in mind that children, the elderly, pregnant women and people with heart and lung disease may be particularly susceptible to ash, smoke, BTEX and PAH.

Material which may extinguish the fires should arrive soon. Results of its application will be known in the next few days.

For more information about the Thomas Fire, please visit our website at [www.venturacountyrecovers.org](http://www.venturacountyrecovers.org). Thank you.