

What To Do When Smoke is Present

During wildfires, smoke—a mixture of small particles, gases including water vapor—can drift into communities, affecting air quality. The immediate health concern is that small particles that can cause burning eyes, runny nose, scratchy throat, headaches and illness. Over longer periods of time, repeated exposures can also worsen chronic heart and lung disease.

Much can be done to minimize one’s exposure to smoke, especially by taking advantage of the timing and variation in smoke impacts over the course of the day.

Protect yourself and your family. *If you can see and smell smoke, look for air quality updates and monitoring data for more information on how much smoke is in your particular area, and consider curtailing outdoor activities if that’s recommended. The worse the smoke or the more sensitive the individual, the more important it is to make these adjustments.*

The following actions can help:

- Keep windows closed if you see or smell smoke. If possible, run air conditioners IN THE RECIRCULATE MODE inside the house and car to keep the smoke out.
- Run HEPA filters inside to filter out dust and particles that do get into your house. Do not use an air cleaner that works by generating ozone.
- Room air cleaners are good to have during smoke emergencies. Make sure that it is a true air cleaner and not a humidifier. If you choose to purchase one, do so before a smoke emergency occurs to avoid having to go to the store and breathing the smoke.
- If it is not possible to reduce indoor smoke it is recommended to stay with a friend or relative who can. It helps to get a break from smoke in smoke free place to reduce one’s exposure to smoke.

Reduce other sources of indoor air pollution. Burning cigarettes, gas, propane and wood burning stoves and furnaces and activities such as cooking, burning candles and incense and vacuuming can greatly increase the particle levels in a home and should be avoided when wildfire smoke is present.

Use the following visibility guidelines to determine air quality conditions, identify health effects, and determine the exertion levels based on the visibility range:

Visual Range - dry air, non backlit landmark	AQI Category (AQI Values)	Meaning	Actions to Protect Yourself
≥ 11 miles	Good	Air quality is satisfactory and poses little or no health risk	None
6-10 miles	Moderate	Air quality is acceptable for most. There may be a moderate health concern for a very small very sensitive people.	Unusually sensitive people should consider reducing prolonged or heavy outdoor exertion.
3-5 miles	Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups	Members of sensitive groups may experience health effects. The general public is not likely to be affected.	People with heart or lung disease, children and adults should reduce prolonged or heavy outdoor exertion. Everyone one else, should limit prolonged or heavy exertion
1.50-2.75 miles	Unhealthy	Everyone may begin to experience more serious health effects.	The following groups should avoid all physical outdoor activity: People with heart or lung disease, children and older adults. Everyone else should avoid prolonged or heavy exertion.
1.00-1.25 miles	Very Unhealthy	Triggers a health alert, meaning everyone may experience more serious health effects	Everyone should avoid any outdoor exertion; people with respiratory or heart disease, the elderly and children should remain indoors.
< 1 mile	Hazardous	The entire population is even more likely to be affected by serious health effects	The following groups should remain indoors and keep activity levels low: People with heart or lung disease; children and older adults. Everyone else should avoid prolonged or heavy exertion.

To use the visibility guidelines, face away from the sun, determine the limit of your visibility range by looking for targets at known distances (miles). The visibility range is the point at which even high contrast objects totally disappear. This is not the point at which you can see the smoke.

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Smoke can affect pets too. The same smoke particles that cause problems for people may also cause problems for animals. Don't force your animals to run or work in smoky conditions. If your pet has heart or lung disease, follow the same visibility guidelines as for sensitive people.

Wearing air masks and bandanas are not recommended. If you choose to wear a mask make sure it is a particulate filter mask which has the word "NIOSH" and either "N95" or P100" printed on it. These can be found at hardware stores or pharmacies and can be effective at reducing exposure to smoke particles as long as the respirators seal closely to the wear's face. *It is important to know that these particulate respirators will not provide complete protection and may even interfere with proper breathing.*

If you have asthma or other lung diseases, be vigilant about taking the medications prescribed by your doctor. If you are supposed to measure your peak flows, make sure you do so. Call your doctor if your symptoms worsen.

For more information please call or visit:

- Daily Rim Fire Air Quality Summary
<http://northcasmoke.blogspot.com/>
- Mariposa County (for questions about Yosemite Valley, Merced River Canyon)
(209) 966-2220, (888)-966-1133 (recorded message)
Current AQI in Mariposa and Lake Don Pedro (La Grange):
<http://www.mariposacounty.org/index.aspx?NID=1356>
- Tuolumne County (Tuolumne River Canyon and points west and north)
(209) 533-5174 (staffed hotline)
Environmental Protection Agency Smoke Website:
<http://airnow.gov/index.cfm?action=smoke.page1>
- Health Alert:
<http://www.mariposacounty.org/index.aspx?NID=89>



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