



As we know, in the past couple of weeks the Northwest has been badly affected with wildfires. The smoke from the fires contain many chemicals that are hazardous. It can affect the lungs, worsening conditions like asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), bronchitis and pneumonia. Wildfire smoke can also affect the heart and increase the risk of heart attack.

Protecting outdoor workers

When outdoor air quality is unhealthy, a basic approach to minimize the health risks is to reduce contact time with wildfire smoke.

Here are some recommendations for protecting outdoor workers:

- Relocate work to less smoky areas
- Reschedule work until air quality improves
- Reduce the level or duration of physical exertion
- Where feasible, provide enclosed structures for employees to work in, where the air is filtered.
- Where feasible, provide enclosed vehicles. During times of poor air quality, operate the air conditioning in “recirculate” mode and keep vents and windows closed.
- Have a plan to evacuate

Protecting indoor workers

Windborne wildfire smoke can be a hazard for workers in office and other commercial buildings. The following steps can improve indoor air quality.

Here are some recommendations for protecting indoor workers:

- Ensure the heating, ventilating, and air conditioning (HVAC) system is working properly, and that air filters are clean and properly seated.
- Work with an HVAC technician to determine the highest filtration rating your HVAC system will support and use the highest rating possible when smoke is present. Filters with high filtration ratings require more frequent change-outs, but these steps can improve indoor air quality.
- Consult with a qualified HVAC technician or ventilation engineer before reducing building air intake to ensure air pressure remains slightly positive. If the air pressure becomes negative compared to the outdoors, pollution will infiltrate the building through the exhaust system and other openings.
- Portable high efficiency HEPA air cleaners can improve air quality in small, defined spaces by removing fine particulates. Do not use ozone generators, personal air purifiers or electrostatic precipitators and ionizers that produce ozone.

Resources:

- <https://files.constantcontact.com/aa2c703e401/0e44da41-7c29-43d5-9e86-2281994036b0.pdf>
- <https://files.constantcontact.com/aa2c703e401/df61a066-3470-4c0d-8e28-2ff3f240736b.pdf>
- https://lni.wa.gov/safety-health/safety-topics/topics/wildfire-smoke?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery