

WILDFIRE SMOKE

Cal/OSHA urges employers to prepare to protect workers from unhealthy air due to wildfire smoke. When workers might be exposed to unhealthy air from wildfires, the [Wildfire Smoke Standard](#) requires employers to take certain steps.

HEALTH EFFECTS OF WILDFIRE SMOKE

- Wildfire smoke contains airborne particulate matter (PM 2.5)
- PM 2.5 can irritate lungs, causes persistent coughing, phlegm, and wheezing
- It can reduce lung function, irritate or cause bronchitis, asthma, heart failure, and cause death
- Persons over 65 or those with heart and lung issues are most likely to have problems
- Employees with symptoms of illness due to wildfire smoke exposure are allowed to seek medical treatment without fear of reprisal

AIR QUALITY INDEX (AQI)

- Cal/OSHA has established an Air Quality Index (AQI) trigger of 151 for PM 2.5. Once the trigger is met certain requirements must be followed
- [Airnow.gov](#) has a website and app which displays the current AQI for local areas

EMPLOYER REQUIREMENTS

Check AQI

In the event of a wildfire, employers must check the current AQI for PM 2.5 periodically throughout each shift.

If the trigger of 151 is ever exceeded employers must provide training outlined [Cal/OSHA's Section 5141.1 Appendix B](#)

Reduce Exposure

Employers must identify ways to lower employee exposure to wildfire smoke, where feasible. Such as:

- Locate work indoors or in vehicles where the air is filtered
- Change procedures to allow work to be moved to a location where the AQI is lower
- Reduce work time in areas without filtered air
- Increase time and frequency of breaks in filtered air
- Lower the physical intensity of work to lower breathing and heart rates

Provide Respiratory Protection

Employers must provide or require respirators for employees working outdoors depending on the PM 2.5 airborne levels.

- *Voluntary Use*
If the employee exposure cannot be reduced to an AQI of 151 or less of PM 2.5, then employees must be provided with respirators, such as N95 masks for voluntary use.
- *Required Use*
Respirator use is mandatory or required when the AQI exceeds 500 for PM 2.5. Employees must receive a medical clearance, respirator fit testing and training prior to wearing a respirator under these conditions.

Additional Cal/OSHA resources are available at [worker safety and health in wildfire regions](#).