



NEWS RELEASE

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Cal/OSHA Reminds Employers to Protect Workers from Unhealthy Air due to Wildfire Smoke

Oakland — Cal/OSHA is reminding employers that California’s [protection from wildfire smoke standard](#) is still in effect, and they must take steps to protect their workers from harmful exposure to unhealthy air due to wildfire smoke.

“Employers are obligated to protect their outdoor workers and must evaluate the health hazards posed by wildfire smoke,” said Cal/OSHA Chief Doug Parker. “If employers cannot move operations indoors where air is adequately filtered and they do not have access to respiratory protection, they may need to halt operations until the outdoor air quality improves.”

Smoke from wildfires contains chemicals, gases and fine particles that can harm health. The greatest hazard comes from breathing fine particles in the air (called PM2.5), which can reduce lung function, worsen asthma or other existing heart and lung conditions, and cause coughing, wheezing and difficulty breathing. These types of respiratory conditions also make the effects of COVID-19 more severe.

If employers move operations indoors or into enclosed spaces, they should be sure to follow [guidelines for prevention of COVID-19 transmission in the workplace](#).

When wildfire smoke affects a worksite, employers must monitor the air quality index (AQI) for PM2.5. Employers can monitor the AQI using the following websites:

- [U.S. EPA AirNow website](#)
- [U.S. Forest Service Wildland Air Quality Response Program website](#)
- [California Air Resources Board website](#)

- [Local air pollution control district websites or local air quality management district website.](#)

If the AQI for PM2.5 is 151 or greater, employers must take the following steps to protect employees:

- Communication – Inform employees of the AQI for PM2.5 and the protective measures available to them.
- Training and Instruction – Provide effective training and instruction to all employees on the information contained in [section 5141.1 Appendix B.](#)
- Modifications – Implement modifications to the workplace, if feasible, to reduce exposure. Examples include providing enclosed structures or vehicles for employees to work in, where the air is filtered.
- Changes – Implement practicable changes to work procedures or schedules. Examples include changing the location where employees work or reducing the amount of time they work outdoors or exposed to unfiltered outdoor air.
- Respiratory protection – Provide proper respiratory protection equipment, such as disposable respirators, for voluntary use.
 - To filter out fine particles, respirators must be labeled N-95, N-99, N-100, R-95, P-95, P-99, or P-100, and must be labeled as approved by the US National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

“Cal/OSHA is working diligently to identify viable available temporary alternatives that would provide workers with an acceptable alternative to a compliant respirator such as an N-95 mask,” added Chief Parker.

CalOES and the California Department of Food and Agriculture are working in partnership to provide approximately one million N-95 masks to help protect farmworkers from wildfire smoke. [County Agricultural Commissioners](#) in affected counties will distribute the masks.

If the AQI for PM2.5 exceeds 500, respirator use is required. Employers must ensure employees use respirators and implement a respiratory protection program as required in California’s [respiratory standard](#). For information or help on developing a respiratory protection program, see Cal/OSHA’s [Respiratory Protection Fact Sheet](#).

Guidance for employers and workers on working safely in conditions with smoke caused by the wildfires [is available on Cal/OSHA’s web page](#), including [information for protecting outdoor workers](#), [details on how to protect indoor workers from outdoor air pollution](#), and [frequently asked questions about N95 masks](#).

Information on current wildfires is available from [CalFire](#) and the [Incident Information System website](#).

Cal/OSHA helps protect workers from health and safety hazards on the job in almost every workplace in California. [Cal/OSHA's Consultation Services Branch](#) provides free and voluntary assistance to employers to improve their health and safety programs. Employers should call (800) 963-9424 for assistance from Cal/OSHA Consultation Services.

Employees with work-related questions or complaints may contact DIR's Call Center in English or Spanish at 844-LABOR-DIR (844-522-6734). The California Workers' Information line at 866-924-9757 provides recorded information in English and Spanish on a variety of work-related topics. Complaints can also be filed confidentially with [Cal/OSHA district offices](#).

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The [California Department of Industrial Relations](#), established in 1927, protects and improves the health, safety, and economic well-being of over 18 million wage earners, and helps their employers comply with state labor laws. DIR is housed within the [Labor & Workforce Development Agency](#). For general inquiries, contact DIR's Communications Call Center at 844-LABOR-DIR (844-522-6734) for help in locating the appropriate [division or program](#) in our department.