

Washington State Patrol Media Release

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Reduce Your Exposure to Smoke during Fire Season

Smoke from wildfires presents health risks for everyone, especially people with lung or heart diseases, whose health can be seriously affected by smoke. Health problems from smoke exposure are dependent on several factors including the level and duration of exposure, age, and individual susceptibility.

Most smoke exposure is due to inversions which are common during fire season; smoke becomes trapped in canyons and valleys similar to a layer of fog. While it is strongest at night and the early morning and usually dissipates by midday, smoke levels are unpredictable.

Sensitive individuals are likely to be affected by carbon monoxide (a colorless, odorless gas, produced by incomplete combustion of wood or other organic materials), and other respiratory irritants present in wildfire smoke. People may have a persistent cough or phlegm, difficulty breathing or develop bronchitis.

During wildfire season, you can undertake a number of strategies to reduce your exposure to wildfire smoke:

- Stay inside with windows and doors shut.
- Avoid cooking and vacuuming, which can increase pollutants indoors.
- Avoid physical exertion.
- Asthmatics should follow their asthma management plan.
- Keep at least a five-day supply of medication on hand.
- Keep airways moist by drinking lots of water. Breathing through a warm, wet washcloth can also help relieve dryness.

- Use the recycle or re-circulate mode on the air conditioner in your home or car. If you do not have air conditioning, staying indoors with the windows closed may be dangerous in extremely hot weather. Consider staying with family or friends who live elsewhere or contact your local Emergency Medical Service for alternatives.
- A fitted mask (OSHA N95) can be used to reduce smoke exposure unless it interferes with breathing. A dust mask is generally ineffective with smoke.
- Contact your healthcare provider if you have symptoms of cardiovascular or lung problems. If you cannot reach your healthcare provider, call 9-1-1.

Other Resources:

AIRNow is a collaborative effort of federal, state and local government agencies, and the media to report ozone and particle pollution conditions. A national two-day Air Quality Outlook as well as air quality conditions and forecasts for each state and several cities are provided on their website <http://airnow.gov>. The National Weather Service website www.wrh.noaa.gov also has information, including satellite photos that are updated throughout the day.

The Office of the State Fire Marshal is a Bureau of the Washington State Patrol, providing fire and life safety services to the citizens of Washington State including inspections of state licensed facilities, plan review of school construction projects, licensing of fire sprinkler contractors and pyrotechnic operators, training Washington State's firefighters, and collecting emergency response data.

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PREVENT FIRES
IT'S YOUR JOB!