

Air Quality during Wildfires and Controlled Burns Guidelines for Protecting your Health during Smoke Events

Source: New Mexico Department of Environmental Health

Recommendations When You Are in an Area Affected by Fire-Related Smoke:

1. If you are sensitive to smoke, evacuate the area if you can. If you choose to stay, remain indoors with the doors and windows closed.
2. If available, use a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter on your air conditioner to reduce the amount of smoke pulled into your home from the outdoors. A HEPA filter may reduce the number of irritating fine particles in indoor air. Do not use swamp coolers when there are high levels of smoke outdoors because the cooler will pull the smoke indoors.
3. During high temperatures, older individuals or those in frail health who do not have an air conditioner should stay with family members or friends who do.
4. Reduce other sources of indoor air pollution such as smoking cigarettes or burning incense.
5. Recognize the symptoms of smoke exposure and pay attention to visibility.
6. For severe shortness of breath, chest pain, decreased mental function or other life-threatening conditions, call 911 immediately.
7. Listen for news updates on the fire and smoke in your area. Continue to follow all precautions and instructions given by fire management authorities.

In areas without real-time particulate monitors, visibility can serve as a good surrogate in determining air quality. The following chart includes guidelines for extrapolating air quality from observed visibility.

| Categories | Visibility in Miles |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Good | 10 miles and up |
| Moderate | 6 to 9 |
| Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups | 3 to 5 |
| Unhealthy | 1½ to 2½ |
| Very Unhealthy | 1 to 1¼ |
| Hazardous | ¾ mile or less |

Procedure for Making Personal Observation to Determine Smoke Concentrations

- Face away from the sun.
- Determine the limit of your visibility range by looking for targets at known distances (miles). Visible range is that point at which even the high contrast objects totally disappear.
- After determining visibility in miles, use the chart to determine health effect and appropriate cautionary statement.

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