
Supporting Communities During Severe Smoke Episodes

*Interim Senate Wildfire Response and Recovery Committee
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The logo for the Oregon Health Authority. It features the word "Oregon" in a smaller, orange, serif font positioned above the word "Health", which is in a larger, dark blue, serif font. Below "Health" is the word "Authority" in a smaller, orange, serif font. A thin blue horizontal line is positioned between "Health" and "Authority". The entire logo is set against a light blue, curved background.

Oregon
Health
Authority

Overview: Wildfire and Severe Smoke and...

- Health Risks and Vulnerable Populations
- Role of Public Health
- General Public Health Mitigation Strategies
- Wildfire, Smoke and COVID-19
- Resources for Communities
- Resources for Individuals
- Information Resources

Health Risks and Vulnerable Populations

Particulate matter in smoke poses immediate and long term health risks to:

- People with asthma, COPD, other lung disorders, or heart disease
- Older adults
- Children
- Pregnant women
- People living in poverty

General public health strategies to combat wildfire smoke risks:

- Preparedness planning
- Emergency response
- Continuous air quality monitoring by DEQ
- Communicate about health risks, available resources, and best practices to minimize health impacts
- Establish and maintain cleaner air spaces
 - Homes
 - Public buildings

The role of the public health system during wildfire and severe smoke events

- Public health provides technical support, coordinates and convene key partners, and has knowledge about vulnerable populations.
- Local public health fulfills these roles in their jurisdictions
- OHA facilitates connections, provides technical assistance, co-convenes interagency severe smoke calls, and jointly issues statewide air advisories.

Informing the public about wildfires and smoke

- OHA and DEQ: annual interagency severe smoke protocol and fire season calls.
- Local/tribal health agencies: issue localized air quality advisories in coordination with DEQ, OHA, National Weather Service (NWS)
- Locals/tribes may ask NWS or DEQ/OHA to issue the notice if smoke is widespread across the state.

Assistance to communities

- Educate the public about DEQ air advisory levels (Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups, Unhealthy, Very Unhealthy, Hazardous) and provide OHA guidance on protective steps (incl. COVID-19)
- Local public health may work with Red Cross to establish general population shelters, designate cleaner air spaces, recommend relocation of sensitive populations, and modify or cancel local events
- No dedicated sources of funding.

Wildfire and Smoke in the Time of COVID: Protecting People

- OHA developing guidance to adapt plans for evacuation shelters, cleaner air spaces and cooling shelters.
 - Plan for social distancing (25 people, spaced 6 feet apart, wear face coverings)
 - May need additional or alternate cleaner air spaces, public spaces often serve as cleaner air space and counties will be in varying degrees of reopening.
- Communicating clearly about N95 respirators vs face coverings, and which hazard each type of mask addresses.

Assistance to Individuals

- Coordinated Care Organization serving the Oregon Health Plan may purchase filtration systems using funding for health related services.
- 2020 legislative session considered bills consistent with Governor's Council on Wildfire Response recommendations to address financial and other barriers faced by renters and low income populations who would benefit from smoke filtration devices.

Online Information Resources on Smoke and Wildfire

- Oregon Smoke Blog – one stop for health, smoke, wildfire info in real time:
<http://oregonsmoke.blogspot.com/>
- OHA Wildfires and Smoke page:
<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/Preparedness/Prepare/Pages/PrepareForWildfire.aspx>
- Oregon Department of Environmental Quality:
Air Quality Monitoring Data:
<https://oraqi.deq.state.or.us/home/map>

Questions?

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