



PUBLIC HEALTH DIVISION  
Center for Health Protection  
Kate Brown, Governor



800 NE Oregon St. Suite 640  
Portland, Oregon 97232  
971-673-0971

July 13, 2020

TO: The Honorable Jeff Golden, Chair  
Senate Interim Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

FROM: Andre Ourso, Administrator  
Center for Health Protection  
Oregon Health Authority

SUBJECT: Follow Up Information About Mitigating Severe Smoke Impacts

The Oregon Health Authority (OHA) appreciates the opportunity to provide additional information in follow up to your questions at the June 5 information session of the Interim Senate Committee on Wildfire Reduction and Recovery regarding impacts to communities from severe wildfire smoke.

**How are organizations such as the Association of Oregon Counties or League of Oregon Cities involved in severe smoke response?**

A primary public health response to severe smoke is to issue an air advisory to alert residents to take measures to protect their health, and air quality advisories are issued collaboratively by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, the Oregon Health Authority, and local or tribal public health authorities. City and county emergency management may take steps to prepare for or respond to advisories by initiating efforts to mitigate smoke impacts, such as by setting up cleaner air spaces.

We would refer you to the Association of Oregon Counties and League of Oregon Cities as the best sources of information about their wildfire smoke-related activities.

**What is the availability of clean air filtration systems to be deployed during severe smoke events? Does the supply chain allow people to get them in their homes quickly if needed?**

OHA encourages at-risk individuals to prepare in advance for smoke events, including by installing air filtration systems if they are able. OHA does not have knowledge or oversight of the supply chain, but based on past observation, local supplies of devices may sell out during a large smoke event. Relevant information about protecting indoor air quality, including information about smoke filtration devices, is available at the following OHA and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency websites:

<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/Preparedness/Prepare/Pages/PrepareForWildfire.aspx>  
<https://www.epa.gov/wildfire-smoke-course/wildfire-smoke-course-resources>

**What is the availability of cleaner air spaces during severe smoke episodes?**

OHA provides guidance for opening cleaner air spaces but does not have comprehensive information from local communities about their deployment. In the past, city and county emergency management has encouraged people to visit public places such as libraries or

publicly accessible places such as shopping malls. The availability of such spaces during the 2020 wildfire season will depend on the COVID-19 reopening phase of the county. For people with homes, maintaining home cleaner air spaces may be a better option for most people during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a home rule state, the decision about whether to establish and operate a public cleaner air space, and whether to follow OHA guidance, is up to a county or city. Tribes have sovereign authority to make such decisions.

OHA is in the process of revising its cleaner air spaces guidance to incorporate COVID-19 social distancing considerations. The current version is available at:  
<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/PREPAREDNESS/PREPARE/Documents/IdentificationOfCleanAirShelters.pdf>

### **Are CCOs the only source of clean air filtration systems for people with low incomes?**

OHA is not aware of many resources to help people with low incomes obtain smoke filtration devices. One known resource is for Oregon Health Plan (Medicaid) members enrolled in a Coordinated Care Organization (CCO). With the flexibility of their global budgets, CCOs are able to offer health-related services (HRS), which are non-covered services offered as supplement to covered benefits under Oregon's Medicaid State Plan to improve care delivery and overall member and community health and well-being. However, the use of HRS to provide smoke filtration devices is not common. OHA was able to determine that in 2019 four CCOs provided devices to five members. One CCO supported community level programs that specifically assess and address air quality during fire season. Medicare does not cover these costs.

Legislation introduced, but not enacted, in the 2020 legislative session would have established a state fund to pay for smoke filtration devices for people with low income, consistent with recommendations in the 2019 report of the Governor's Council on Wildfire Response.