



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Testimony in Support of [HB 2813](#)

March 17, 2021

Chair Holvey, Vice Chair Bonham and Grayber, and members of the committee:

For the record, my name is Khanh Pham. I represent House District 46. I am honored to testify today in support of HB 2813 as a co-chief sponsor for this bill alongside Representative Dexter.

As a longtime environmental justice organizer, I have long organized both in my district and throughout the state because we know that the disproportionate burden of air pollution and toxic air falls primarily on low income and communities of color.

This past September, much of Oregon was engulfed in hazardous wildfires and toxic smoke. The air quality in communities across Oregon was among the worst in the world. Some of us were fortunate enough to continue working indoors, where we evaded the smoke and kept our air filters running 24/7. But for those working outdoors, there was no such escape. Outdoor workers spent countless hours working directly in the thick of the smoke- often performing laborious tasks requiring them to breathe even harder, thereby aggressively increasing their exposure.

These workers are highly essential to the backbone of our community. They are our construction workers, building homes to meet strict deadlines. They are our farmworkers, repeatedly bending over to harvest the food we purchase at the grocery store. We *need* to be proactive, so that if and when another air quality disaster strikes, employers are prepared to protect outdoor workers.

House Bill 2813 provides the necessary protections that would have safeguarded so many workers had it been enacted before the 2020 wildfires. Specifically, the bill focuses on particulate matter 2.5, which is directly emitted by wildfires. [1]

These fine particles stay in the air longer, bypass the nose and throat and penetrate deep into lungs and blood vessels. Peer-reviewed research has shown that these fine particles trigger and worsen diseases asthma, heart disease, bronchitis, and can lead to heart attacks and strokes.

Fine particle exposure also increases the risk of birth defects. Research has confirmed lower birth weights in infants who were exposed to the 2003 southern California wildfire while in utero. [4] Note that the recent 2020 wildfires burned nearly twice as many acres as that of the 2003 southern California wildfire. I've listed only a few of the health risks of exposure to PM 2.5, which again, is directly emitted by wildfires.

HB 2813 protects outdoor workers from wildfire smoke by limiting their risk of exposure while still maintaining their job security.

Lastly, Oregon's Occupational Safety and Health statute prohibits unsafe or unhealthy places of employment. ORS 654.015. It is obvious that exposure to wildfire smoke is unsafe and unhealthy- we made this clear when we recommended all Oregonians to stay indoors as much as possible in September. House bill 2813 would update our occupational safety and health laws to match the current trend: that is west coast wildfires are becoming more frequent and burning even more acres.

In conclusion, House bill 2813 would protect Oregonians working outdoors in wildfire smoke by expanding access to respirators and allowing them to seek medical treatment without punishment. Please join me in supporting HB 2813. Thank you.

[1] <https://molekule.science/what-is-pm-2-5-and-how-can-you-reduce-your-exposure/>

[2] <https://blissair.com/what-is-pm-2-5.htm>

[3] https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2017-12/htcs-set122117.php

[4] <https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/doi/10.1289/ehp.1104515>