



NEWS RELEASE

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Cal/OSHA Urges Employers to Prepare to Protect Workers from Unhealthy Air due to Wildfire Smoke

Oakland—Cal/OSHA is urging employers in California to be prepared to protect workers from unhealthy air due to wildfire smoke. When workers might be exposed to unhealthy air from wildfires, California's [protection from wildfire smoke standard](#) requires employers to take steps such as changing the location of work operations, modifying work schedules or providing proper respiratory protection like N95 respirators.

According to [CalFire](#), there have been over 4,000 wildfire incidents so far in California in 2021 and more than 100 structures have been damaged. Smoke from these wildfires contains chemicals, gases and fine particles that can harm health. One of the most harmful hazards comes from breathing fine particles in the air (called PM2.5), which can reduce lung function, worsen asthma or other existing heart and lung conditions, and cause coughing, wheezing and difficulty breathing.

When wildfire smoke affects a worksite, employers must check the air quality index (AQI) for PM2.5 and throughout the work shift as needed to protect employees. Employers can monitor the AQI with their own devices or use websites like the [U.S. EPA AirNow website](#) or [local air quality management district websites](#).

If the AQI for PM2.5 is 151 or greater, employers must take the following steps to protect employees:

- Communication – Inform employees of the AQI for PM2.5 and the protective measures available to them.
- Training and Instruction – Provide effective training and instruction to all employees on the information contained in [section 5141.1 Appendix B](#).
- Modifications – Implement modifications to the workplace, if feasible, to reduce exposure. Examples include providing enclosed structures or vehicles for employees to work in, where the air is filtered.

- Changes – Implement practicable changes to work procedures or schedules. Examples include changing the location where employees work or reducing the amount of time they work outdoors or exposed to unfiltered outdoor air.
- Respiratory protection – Provide proper respiratory protection equipment, such as disposable respirators, for voluntary use.
 - To filter out fine particles, respirators must be labeled N-95, N-99, N-100, R-95, P-95, P-99, or P-100, and **must be labeled as approved by the US National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).**

If employers move operations indoors, they must follow [Cal/OSHA's COVID-19 Prevention Emergency Temporary Standards](#), which require unvaccinated workers to wear face coverings indoors.

To assist employers with identifying available supplies of respirators, Cal/OSHA is maintaining a [list of vendors](#) who have confirmed they have at least 100,000 NIOSH-certified disposable N95 respirators in stock and available for purchase and delivery.

If the AQI for PM2.5 exceeds 500 due to wildfire smoke, respirator use is required. Employers must ensure employees use respirators and implement a respiratory protection program as required in California's [respiratory standard](#). For information or help on developing a respiratory protection program, see Cal/OSHA's [Respiratory Protection Fact Sheet](#).

Guidance for employers and workers on working safely in conditions with smoke caused by wildfires [is available on Cal/OSHA's web page](#), including [information for protecting outdoor workers](#), [details on how to protect indoor workers from outdoor air pollution](#), and [frequently asked questions about N95 masks](#). Cal/OSHA's [Training Academy](#) has training videos in English and Spanish on the requirements to protect workers exposed to wildfire smoke hazards.

Cal/OSHA helps protect workers from health and safety hazards on the job in almost every workplace in California. [Cal/OSHA's Consultation Services Branch](#) provides free and voluntary assistance to employers to improve their health and safety programs. Workers who have questions about wildfire smoke hazards and protections can call 833-579-0927 to speak with a Cal/OSHA representative during normal business hours. Complaints about workplace safety and health hazards can be filed confidentially with [Cal/OSHA district offices](#).

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Employers with Questions on Requirements May Contact: InfoCons@dir.ca.gov, or call your [local Cal/OSHA Consultation Office](#)