



MEMBER ALERT

Cal/OSHA Issues Advisory on Worker Safety for Regions with Wildfire Smoke

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Oakland—Cal/OSHA is advising employers that special precautions must be taken to protect workers from hazards from wildfire smoke.

Smoke from wildfires contains chemicals, gases and fine particles that can harm health. The greatest hazard comes from breathing fine particles in the air, which can reduce lung function, worsen asthma and other existing heart and lung conditions, and cause coughing, wheezing and difficulty breathing.

Guidance for employers and workers on working safely in conditions with heavy smoke caused by the 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](#).

When employees are working outdoors where the air is affected by wildfire smoke, employers are required by Cal/OSHA's standards on [Control of Harmful Exposure to Employees](#) and [Respiratory Protection](#) to determine if the outdoor air is a "harmful exposure" to employees. Exposure is harmful when the pollution or contaminants in the air cause (or are likely to cause) injury, illness, disease, impairment or loss of function.

Local air quality districts provide information on outdoor air that can assist employers in determining if the outside air is harmful to employees. Employers should pay special attention when the outdoor air quality for airborne particles is "unhealthy," "very unhealthy," or "hazardous." The outdoor air quality is posted at the U.S. EPA website [airnow.gov](#).

When exposure to wildfire smoke is considered harmful, employers are required to take the following measures to protect workers:

- Implement feasible modifications to the workplace to reduce exposure. Examples include providing enclosed structures or vehicles for employees to work in, where the air is filtered.
- 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.
- Provide proper respiratory protection equipment, such as disposable respirators, if the previous measures are not feasible or do not prevent harmful exposures.
 - 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).