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Health, Environment Departments Advise Taking Precautions In Areas Affected By Smoke

(Santa Fe) – The New Mexico Department of Health and the New Mexico Environment Department today issued a statewide advisory for people in areas affected by smoke from forest fires currently burning in New Mexico. The departments urge residents to minimize their exposure to smoke.

“We want people to protect their health by taking precautions to reduce the effect of smoke in their area,” said Health Secretary Michelle Lujan Grisham.

Forest fire smoke is especially harmful to persons with underlying health conditions such as asthma, emphysema, compromised immune system and cardiovascular disease. The smoke may aggravate pre-existing cardiovascular disease that may result in symptoms such as chest pain.

For active children and adults, breathing smoke may result in symptoms such as chest tightness, wheezing, shortness of breath, coughing and irritation of eyes, nose, and throat.

The Department of Health recommends the following to avoid exposure to smoke:

- Do not run swamp coolers because they bring outside air inside your home.
- Reduce physical activity and decrease outdoor activity.
- Only use your air conditioners if they have a “re-circulate” setting.
- Stay indoors as much as possible.
- HEPA filters have been effective in reducing particulates indoors in previous fires.
- Ozone generators do not remove particles from the air and are not useful in smoke-filled environments.
- Personal masks are usually not helpful because smoke particles are too small to be filtered

If symptoms associated with these pre-existing conditions do not respond to your usual recommended medications, see your health-care provider immediately. For additional information call the New Mexico Department of Health at 1-800-879-3421.

The Environment Department’s Air Quality Bureau operates six continuous particulate matter monitors in the state. These monitors are located in Taos, Santa Fe and Carlsbad as well as three in Dona Ana County. Real-time information for these monitors is available on the Environment Department’s website at <http://air.state.nm.us>.

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In areas without real-time particulate monitors, visibility can serve as a good surrogate in determining air quality. The following chart includes guidelines for extrapolating air quality from observed visibility.

Categories	Visibility in Miles	Particulate Levels (averaged 1 hour, $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$)
Good	10 miles and up	0 – 40
Moderate	6 to 9	41 – 80
Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups	3 to 5	81 – 175
Unhealthy	1½ to 2½	176 – 300
Very Unhealthy	1 to 1¼	301 – 500
Hazardous	¾ mile or less	over 500

To determine smoke concentrations based on personal observation:

- Face away from the sun
- Determine the limit of your visibility range by looking for targets at known distances (miles). Visible range is that point at which even the high contrast objects totally disappear.
- After determining visibility in miles, use the chart to determine health effect and appropriate cautionary statement.

For further information on smoke, go to the Environment Department's website: <http://air.state.nm.us>.

Media: Fact sheet is attached.

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