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New Mexico Wildfire Awareness Week - Where There's Fire, There's Smoke!

Where We Live, How We Live...Living with Wildfire in the Southwest

During Wildfire Awareness Week, the New Mexico Departments of Environment Health and want to remind residents how to be prepared for and stay healthy during this year's wildfire season.

Smoke is a complex mixture of carbon dioxide, water vapor, carbon monoxide, particulate matter, hydrocarbons, and other organic chemicals, nitrogen oxides, and trace minerals. This mixture can irritate and even injure the mouth, nose, throat, and lung tissue.

In healthy people, symptoms of smoke exposure usually include irritation of eyes, nose and throat or breathing discomfort. More severe symptoms may include chest tightness, wheezing, shortness of breath, and coughing

If you have asthma, a chronic lung disease, or cardiovascular disease, smoke exposure can aggravate these conditions. In smoky conditions, if you develop symptoms which do not respond to your usual medication, see your health care provider immediately.

General recommendations are based on air visibility. 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
Good	10 miles and up
Moderate	6 to 9
Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups	3 to 5
Unhealthy	1½ to 2½
Very Unhealthy	1 to 1¼
Hazardous	¾ mile or less

Recommendations When the Category of Visibility is 'Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups' or Worse :

1. If you are sensitive to smoke, evacuate the area if you can. If you choose to stay, remain indoors with the doors and windows closed.
2. If available, use a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter on your air conditioner to reduce the amount of smoke pulled into your home from the outdoors. A HEPA filter may reduce the number of irritating fine particles in indoor air. Do not use swamp coolers when there are high levels of smoke outdoors because the cooler will pull the smoke indoors.
3. During high temperatures, older individuals or those in frail health who do not have an air conditioner should stay with family members or friends who do.
4. Reduce other sources of indoor air pollution such as smoking cigarettes or burning incense.
5. Recognize the symptoms of smoke exposure and pay attention to visibility.
6. For severe shortness of breath, chest pain, decreased mental function or other life-threatening conditions, call 911 immediately.
7. Listen for news updates on the fire and smoke in your area. Continue to follow all precautions and instructions given by fire management authorities.

Procedure for Making Personal Observation to Determine Smoke Concentrations (Visibility)

- 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 more information go to www.nmfireinfo.com and click on the link for Smoke Management. You may also go to NMED's website, <http://www.nmenv.state.nm.us/aqb/Wildfire-PM.html> and/or the DOH website <http://www.health.state.nm.us/>