

N E W S R E L E A S E

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Cal/OSHA Reminds Employers to Protect Workers if the Air Quality is Unhealthy due to Wildfire Smoke

Oakland—Cal/OSHA is advising employers that steps must be taken to protect workers from harmful exposure if the air quality is unhealthy due to wildfire smoke.

California's [protection from wildfire smoke standard](#) applies to workplaces where the Air Quality Index (AQI) for fine particles in the air is 151 or greater and where workers may be exposed to wildfire smoke.

When wildfire smoke affects a worksite, employers must monitor the AQI for particulate matter in the air, known as PM2.5. Employers can monitor the AQI using the following websites:

- [U.S. EPA AirNow website](#)
- [U.S. Forest Service Wildland Air Quality Response Program website](#)
- [California Air Resources Board website](#)
- [Local air pollution control district websites or local air quality management district website.](#)

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 – Train 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 the AQI for PM2.5 exceeds 500, 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](#).

Smoke from wildfires contains chemicals, gases and fine particles that can harm health. The greatest hazard comes from breathing fine particles in the air (called PM2.5), 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 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](#).

Information on current wildfires is available from [CalFire](#) and the [Incident Information System website](#).

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. Employers should call (800) 963-9424 for assistance from Cal/OSHA Consultation Services.

Employees with work-related questions or complaints may contact DIR's Call Center in English or Spanish at 844-LABOR-DIR (844-522-6734). The California Workers' Information line at 866-924-9757 provides recorded information in English and Spanish on a variety of work-related topics. Complaints can also be filed confidentially with [Cal/OSHA district offices](#).

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