

September 30, 2019

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RE: Comments on August 13, 2019 Proposed Revision to Emergency Regulation Section 5141.1  
Protection from Wildfire Smoke

To Whom It May Concern,

I'm writing to you on behalf of Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital and Trauma Center's Environmental Health and Safety Department to provide comments with regards to the August 13, 2019 Proposed Revision to Emergency Regulation Section 5141.1 Protection from Wildfire Smoke. My comments and **suggestions** are as follows:

Lowering the action threshold to 100 would be problematic for several reasons.

- During wildfire incidents in 2018, we had a very difficult time getting N95s due to other employers and the public buying up the existing supply. That was without a regulation requiring employers to do so. We need N95s to keep our employees safe from airborne transmissible diseases and to meet the requirements of the ATD standard. Were we to have a pandemic at the same time as a wildfire smoke incident, the resulting shortage of N95s would put our employees at risk of contracting life-threatening diseases. I have heard some individuals make the argument that manufacturers would ramp up production to meet the additional demand for respirators generated by this regulation. This will not be the case. In 2018, we had 12 days where the AQI in San Francisco was over 150. During that period, we used approximately 20,000 N95s. Before that, the last time San Francisco exceeded an AQI of 150 was in 2002. Manufacturers are not going to greatly increase production for events that occur on such an infrequent basis.
- Requiring respirators to be made available at the "Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups" threshold is a departure from the way Cal/OSHA typically sets PELs. Generally, it is assumed that the workforce is comprised of relatively healthy adults. However, those at risk during an AQI of 101 or above are children, the elderly, or people with heart and lung disease; not groups who are likely to be performing strenuous work outdoors.
- Our local government and the Air Districts are not suggesting the use of respirators until an AQI of 151 or greater. If Cal/OSHA pushes ahead with requiring voluntary respirator availability at

101 or greater, they will not only be running counter to state air quality experts, but they will create confusion as the public will be getting different messages from different state agencies.

**I recommend maintaining the current AQI threshold of 151 when creating a permanent standard.**

Using MERV ratings to establish what is and isn't "adequate" filtration could be a challenge.

- If Cal/OSHA were to dictate a higher level MERV rating that most buildings currently possess, it will be infeasible those businesses to simply upgrade their HVAC systems. Higher MERV rating filters would require additional costly changes to achieve proper balance in the system such as more powerful motors and appropriate fans.
- High MERV rating systems can cause issues when PM is elevated. During one of the fires last year, our filter banks collapsed due to the filters becoming overloaded. The pressure within the system built up so much, it bent the metal frame the filters were held in.

**If you follow through on establishing a minimum MERV rating, please ensure that it is something that can feasibly be achieved in existing buildings.**

Appendix B has a section stating that "A respirator will provide much less protection if facial hair interferes with the seal. Loose-fitting powered air purifying respirators may be worn by people with facial hair since they often do not have seals that are affected by facial hair". My concern is that this seems to suggest that an employer should provide PAPRs for employees with facial hair. This would place a huge financial burden on employers who have many bearded employees. I'd estimate that we would need to buy 100+ PAPRs that would ONLY be used during wildfire smoke incidents.

**I suggest either removing the PAPR language altogether, or add language making it clear that, for the purposes of this standard, employers have no obligation to purchase anything beyond an N95 for voluntary employee use.**

I want to close by thanking you for drafting this standard. It will be very helpful to have regulatory guidance on how to protect employees during wildfire smoke events. This is much easier than trying to monitor for individual chemical components of smoke. Thank you as well for giving me the opportunity to provide feedback. Feel free to contact me at (628) 206-7745 or email ([mike.harris@sfdph.org](mailto:mike.harris@sfdph.org)) if you have any additional questions.

Sincerely,



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