

# NBSIA Member Services Safety Bulletin

September 2020

## WILDFIRE SMOKE

This serves as a reminder to protect outdoor workers at school sites from exposure to wildfire smoke.

With impacts from numerous wildfires being felt in Solano, Napa and Yolo Counties, Districts should comply with Cal/OSHA's emergency wildfire smoke standard which took effect in July 2019 and has been extended into 2021.

Smoke from wildfires contains chemicals, gases and fine particulates can harm health, with the greatest hazard coming from breathing fine particles in the air which can reduce lung function, worsen asthma or other existing heart and lung conditions, and cause coughing, wheezing and difficulty breathing, according to Cal/OSHA.

**The standard is triggered in areas where the current air quality index (AQI) is 151 or greater for airborne particulate matter 2.5 micrometers in diameter and smaller.**

Employers must check air quality indexes where workers are located before and periodically during each shift and take steps to mitigate exposure by relocating workers to enclosed buildings or locations where the air quality index is 150 or lower. Employers with air quality conditions at and above the 151 AQI threshold are required to provide workers respirators for voluntary use, such as N95 filtering facepiece respirators, and must also comply with the applicable requirements of Cal/OSHA's respirator standard.

If employers cannot move operations indoors where air is adequately filtered and they do not have access to respiratory protection, they may need to halt operations until the outdoor air quality improves.

NOTE: Employees with medical conditions, including but not limited to, heart and lung problems must consult with a licensed health care provider before wearing a respirator.

Additionally, if operations and activities are relocated indoors or into enclosed spaces because of the wildfires, District personnel must ensure they are also following guidelines for preventing potential transmission of COVID-19 in the workplace.

The air quality index for areas in all 3 counties can be found at the U.S. EPA's AirNow website: <https://www.airnow.gov/>.

Cal/OSHA guidance for working safely in wildfire smoke conditions is available here: <https://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/Worker-Health-and-Safety-in-Wildfire-Regions.html>



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