

Wildfire Smoke: A Guide for Public Health Officials 2017 Accomplishments Report and 2018 Update

US EPA, along with federal and state partners, updated the *Wildfire Smoke: A Guide for Public Health Officials* (Guide) in May 2016. This Guide provides information about whose health is most affected by wildfire smoke, how to reduce exposure to smoke, what public health actions are recommended, and how to best communicate air quality to the public. The purpose of the Guide is to provide guidance to help communities respond to wildfires and to provide resources to help educate the public about actions they can take to protect their health.

EPA partnered with Environmental Council of the States (ECOS) and Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) to work with state environmental and public health organizations to “test drive” the Guide and to use their experience to provide feedback on revising the Guide for future use. To achieve this, EPA, ECOS and ASTHOS worked with state environmental agencies, state public health agencies and state air associations (Association of Air Pollution Control Agencies, AAPCA and the National Association of Clean Air Agencies, NACAA). The Guide is the product of a collaborative effort by scientists, air quality specialists and public health professionals from federal, state and local agencies, and it is widely used by state and local agencies in wildland fire situations. The Guide includes information such as the characteristics of wildfire smoke, particulate matter level estimates, health effects of smoke, at-risk populations, strategies to reduce smoke exposure, and recommended public health actions (based on NowCast). The Guide’s Appendix includes information about protecting indoor workers from smoke, respirator use, cleanup, cleaner air shelters, and smoke alert examples. The updated Guide also helps state environment and health officials provide consistent guidance to the public during wildfire events that often occur over large geographical areas with multiple states.

The release of the updated Guide is delayed because two important questions raised by users are being addressed. These are (1) recommendations for multiday exposures (e.g., the 30 days of smoke in Montana this past summer) and (2) recommendations for times when there are both high smoke levels and high temperatures in areas with low prevalence of air conditioning (e.g., Seattle this past summer). Both issues are important public health considerations related to wildfire events, and EPA wants to address these in the revision rather than publishing an addendum. The updated Guide is expected to be available in December 2018. The current guide remains available, and some fact sheets resulting from feedback from state and local Guide users are currently available on EPA’s website.

Deliverables

- States reviewed and provided feedback to EPA on initial revisions to Guide (April-May 2016)
- States piloted the revised Guide during the 2016 fire season (June-September 2016)
- States provided comments on draft revised version based on use during 2016 (September-October 2016)
- Developed factsheets to use during wildfire events on the following topics: Prepare for Fire Season; Indoor Air Filtration; Reduce Your Smoke Exposure; Protect Yourself from Ash; and Respiratory Protection

Next Steps

- EPA and federal partners will use state feedback to develop the final Guide (December 2018)
- In consultation with EPA and other federal partners, states will help develop and implement outreach and communications strategies to promote the Guide’s use by state programs and their partners

More information:

https://airnow.gov/index.cfm?action=topics.smoke_wildfires

<https://www.epa.gov/smoke-ready-toolbox-wildfires>