



# NORSTEEL SAFETY SENTINEL

PROMOTING A SAFE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

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## OKANAGAN WILDFIRE SEASON SAFETY

Last year's wildfire season marked B.C.'s most destructive on record: 2.8 million hectares burned, more than double any previous year. This year's wildfire season is expected to begin earlier than normal, and last longer, according to the federal government's Emergency Preparedness Minister. Understanding these aspects of wildfire season can help individuals and communities better prepare for and respond to wildfire threats.



## HEALTH EFFECTS OF WILDFIRE SMOKE

- Sore throat
- Eye irritation
- Runny nose
- Mild cough
- Phlegm production
- Wheezy breathing
- Headaches



## AIR QUALITY HEALTH INDEX (AQHI)

- ⇒ Illustrates the level of health risk with a number and colour scale of 1 to 10+
- ⇒ Labels the health risk as low, moderate, high or very high
- ⇒ Provides the predicted air-quality health risk over the next 48 hours
- ⇒ Provides advice on actions to minimize the health risk from air pollution.

1-HOUR PM <sub>2.5</sub> (µg/m <sup>3</sup> )	PROVINCIAL AQHI	AQHI RISK CATEGORY	HEALTH MESSAGE FOR PEOPLE AT HIGHER RISK	HEALTH MESSAGE FOR GENERAL POPULATION
0 – 10	1	LOW	Enjoy your usual outdoor activities.	Ideal air quality for outdoor activities.
11 – 20	2			
21 – 30	3			
31 – 40	4	MODERATE	Consider reducing or rescheduling strenuous activities outdoors if you experience symptoms.	No need to modify your usual outdoor activities unless you experience symptoms.
41 – 50	5			
51 – 60	6			
61 – 70	7	HIGH	Reduce or reschedule strenuous activity outdoors.	Consider reducing or rescheduling strenuous activities outdoors if you experience symptoms.
71 – 80	8			
81 – 90	9			
91 – 100	10			
101+	10+	VERY HIGH	Avoid strenuous activity outdoors.	Reduce or reschedule strenuous activity outdoors, especially if you experience symptoms.

TABLE 1: 1-hour concentrations of fine particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) can be used to estimate the Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) in British Columbia.

## THE COMPOSITION OF WILDFIRE SMOKE

Wildfire smoke is a complex mixture of gases and particles that interact and change as they move away from the fire. The individual particles in wildfire smoke are very small, but they tend to stick together as they travel away from the fire. Of all the pollutants in wildfire smoke, fine particulate matter (PM2.5) poses the greatest risk to human health.

The microscopic soot particles can be inhaled deep into the lungs, where they may cause inflammation and irritation. Volatile organic compounds and other gases can also irritate the eyes, nose, throat, and lungs.

## BC WILDFIRE SERVICES APP



The official BC Wildfire Service mobile app is available for free download in the [App Store](#) and on [Google Play](#). The BC Wildfire Service App provides up-to-date wildfire information on your mobile phone, helping you stay informed about wildfires and wildfire-related events and conditions across B.C.

## PROTECT YOURSELF FROM WILDFIRE SMOKE

- Get prepared for the wildfire smoke season as you would do in any other summer.
- Take it easy and limit outdoor exercise on smoky days because the harder you breathe, the more smoke you inhale
- Drink lots of water to help reduce inflammation
- If you are working outdoors, use an N95 respirator that has been properly fitted by occupational health and safety professionals
- If you have a chronic health condition, work with your health care providers to create a management plan for smoky conditions. If you use rescue medications, make sure that you have an ample supply at home and carry them with you at all times during wildfire season.
- Use the Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) to evaluate local and regional air quality conditions
- Know where to find other reliable information on wildfire smoke and air quality.
- People with pre-existing medical conditions should take extra precautions and should keep their rescue medications with them at all times. If you cannot get your symptoms under control, seek prompt medical attention.