

Controlled Burning in Pringle Falls Area Prompts DEQ Advisory

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Smoke may cause potential health impacts in Bend and nearby communities; Air quality may approach the “unhealthy for sensitive groups” level; Smoke from prescribed burning in Pringle Falls area contributes to problem

Smoke concentrations in Bend, La Pine, Sunriver and neighboring communities may approach the “unhealthy for sensitive groups” level on the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality’s Wildfire Air Quality Rating Scale (WAQR). DEQ reminds area residents “especially those individuals who may be sensitive to smoke” that there are precautions they can take to mitigate breathing problems or other symptoms from smoke. Additionally, there are helpful Web-related tools available that may help individuals determine when to take protective measures.

Sources may include smoke from a U.S. Forest Service prescribed burning approximately five miles northwest of La Pine in the 1,160-acre Pringle Falls Research Natural Area, where 50 firefighters have burned more than 300 acres since Wednesday. Burning will continue Friday to consume brush and woody debris that can feed wildland fires. Despite favorable afternoon winds smoke may continue to settle in low-lying areas at night and into the morning.

Smoke plumes are unpredictable, and conditions can improve or worsen rapidly depending on the location. Widespread smoke dispersion is especially influenced by variable weather patterns that can create dramatic short-term changes in air quality. Periods of smoke dispersal aided by surface winds can frequently be followed by stable conditions that trap smoke in low lying areas.

Smoke is made up of tiny particles (particulate matter) that can be harmful to breathe, especially for children, older adults and those with asthma and other lung or heart conditions. This particulate matter also reduces visibility, causing the haze that has been noticeable in the area. Symptoms that people may experience from smoke include varying degrees of repeated coughing, shortness of breath, scratchy throat, wheezing, irritated eyes, sinus complications, chest tightness, heart palpitations, nausea, unusual fatigue or lightheadedness. Particle pollution is often highest during the coldest times of the day, typically in the evening and early morning.

According to the WAQR, designed to measure real-time impacts from forest smoke plumes, including smoke from prescribed burns, particulate levels overnight in Bend approached the unhealthy for sensitive groups category, a level at which everyone may begin to experience health effects. Updated health category information is available at: http://www.deq.state.or.us/aq/api/wildfire/wildfireAQI_NE.aspx.

“When smoke gets to “unhealthy for sensitive group” levels, children, the elderly and those with respiratory conditions should take measures to limit their outdoor activities,” said DEQ Air Quality Manager, Linda Hayes-Gorman.

For more information on the effects of smoke, see DEQ’s Web site at: <http://www.deq.state.or.us/aq/burning/wildfires/index.htm>.

Area residents can take the following precautions to improve breathing conditions or other symptoms when problematic smoke conditions are likely:

§ Stay indoors if possible; keep doors and windows closed if practicable

§ Avoid strenuous outdoor activity

§ Asthma sufferers or those who suffer from other respiratory problems should follow their asthma or

breathing management plan or contact your health provider

Â§ Be aware of smoke concentrations in your area and avoid those areas with highest concentrations

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