

Wildland Smoke Prompts New DEQ Air Quality Advisory

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Stating that smoke from wildland fires in the region may cause potential health concerns, the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) issued a new warning that air quality is approaching unhealthy levels.

Smoke concentrations in Bend and Deschutes County reached the moderate level, just outside the “good” category, on the Oregon DEQ’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.

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.

According to the WAQR, designed to measure real-time impacts from forest fire smoke plumes, particulate levels in Bend and Deschutes County at 8 a.m. on August 15 were in the moderate category. Particle pollution is often highest during the coldest times of the day, typically in the evening and early morning.

“When wildfire smoke gets to these 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.

Wildfire smoke plumes are unpredictable, and conditions can improve or worsen rapidly depending on the location. 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
- Be aware of smoke concentrations in your area and avoid those areas with highest concentrations

Residents are also encouraged to:

- Visit the WAQR at: http://www.deq.state.or.us/aq/api/wildfire/wildfireAQI_NE.aspx.
- Determine what areas are being impacted by visiting the Northwest Interagency Coordination Center's Large Fire Information Summary at: http://www.nwccweb.us/information/fire_info.asp.
- View wildfire smoke forecasts issued daily by the Oregon Department of Forestry when significant wildfires are occurring at: http://www.odf.state.or.us/DIVISIONS/protection/fire_protection/daily/wfsmoke.asp
- Visit the National Weather Service Forecast Office seven day hazardous weather outlook (includes smoke outlook) at: <http://www.wrh.noaa.gov/pdt/currentHazards/graphicalHazards.php?wfo= PDT & tab=1 & lang=eng>
- View the Interactive fire weather planning forecast at: <http://www.wrh.noaa.gov/pdt/forecast/fireWeather.php?wfo= PDT>
- Tune to local radio and TV stations and the Weather Channel in affected areas that may include the very latest fire information in news programming and weather reports.

Other links:

USFS & USEPA smoke forecast data: www.blueskyrains.org

National Interagency Fire Center: <http://www.nifc.gov/>

American Lung Association: <http://www.lungoregon.org/>

Oregon Department of Human Services/Health Division, Asthma Group:
<http://www.ohd.hr.state.or.us/asthma/>

EPA: How Smoke from Fires Can Affect Your Health: <http://www.epa.gov/airnow/smoke2/smokecover.html>.

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>.

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