

Health Advisory – Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (LACDPH)
August 31, 2009

Air Quality Alert #5:

Smoke from fires causing unhealthy Air Quality for all individuals in parts of LA County

LOS ANGELES - Due to several fires burning in Southern California, air quality continues to be adversely affected in several parts of Los Angeles County. According to the South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD), smoke from the Station Fire near La Caada has caused hazardous air quality in the San Gabriel Mountains and the West San Gabriel Valley. Areas of direct smoke impact include Altadena, La Caada, Flintridge, La Crescenta, Tujunga, and Sunland. The Los Angeles County Health Officer, Dr. Jonathan E. Fielding, urges all individuals in these areas, or areas where there is visible smoke or the odor of smoke, to avoid unnecessary outdoor and indoor physical exertion, such as exercise.

"In all areas of visible smoke or where there is an odor of smoke, all individuals are urged to be cautious and to avoid unnecessary outdoor activities. We are also advising schools that are in session in smoke-impacted areas to suspend outside physical activities in these areas, including physical education and after-school sports, until conditions improve," said Jonathan E. Fielding, MD, MPH, Director of Public Health and County Health Officer.

Additional areas that may be impacted by smoke include: the Santa Clarita Valley, San Fernando Valley, Central Los Angeles County, and East San Gabriel Valley.

Non-school related sports organizations, such as Little Leagues, for children and adults are advised to cancel outdoor practices in areas where there is visible smoke, soot, or ash, or where there is an odor of smoke. This also applies to other recreational outdoor activity, such as hikes or picnics, in these areas.

Throughout Los Angeles County, sensitive individuals, such as those with heart disease, asthma or other respiratory disease, should follow these recommendations and stay indoors as much as possible even in areas where smoke, soot, or ash cannot be seen or there is no odor of smoke.

"It is difficult to tell where ash or soot from a wildfire will go, or how winds will affect the level of dust particles in the air, so we ask all individuals to be aware of their immediate environment and how it might affect their health," said Dr. Fielding.

People can participate in indoor sports or other strenuous activity in areas with visible smoke, soot, or ash, provided the indoor location has air conditioning that does not draw air from the outside and it has closed windows and doors to protect the cleanliness of indoor air. If not, it is recommended that all individuals follow these guidelines as if they were outside.

The following recommendations will help you protect yourself and your family from harmful effects of bad air quality:

If you see or smell smoke, or see a lot of particles and ash in the air, avoid unnecessary outdoor activity to limit your exposure to harmful air. This is especially important for those with heart or lung disease (including asthma), the elderly and children.

If outdoor air is bad, try to keep indoor air as clean as possible by keeping windows and doors closed. Air conditioners that re-circulate air within the home can help filter out harmful particles.

Avoid using air conditioning units that only draw in air from the outside or that do not have a re-circulating option. Residents should check the filters on their air conditioners and replace them regularly.

Indoor air filtration devices with HEPA filters can further reduce the level of particles that circulate indoors.

If it is too hot during the day to keep the doors or windows closed and you do not have an air conditioning unit that re-circulates indoor air, consider going to an air conditioned public place, such as a library or shopping center, to stay cool and to protect yourself from harmful air.

Do not use fireplaces (either wood burning or gas), candles, and vacuums. Use damp cloths to clean dusty indoor surfaces. Do not smoke.

If you have symptoms of lung or heart disease that may be related to smoke exposure, including severe coughing, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, wheezing, chest tightness or pain, palpitations, nausea or unusual fatigue or lightheadedness, contact your doctor immediately or go to an urgent care center.

When smoke is heavy for a prolonged period of time, fine particles can build up indoors even though you may not be able to see them.

Wearing a mask may prevent exposures to large particles. However, most masks do not prevent exposure to fine particles and toxic gases, which may be more dangerous to your health.

To find a cooling center, call the LA County Information line at 2-1-1 or visit the Public Health website at <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov>.

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