

Developmental Disabilities Administration

Wildfire Preparedness

Care Provider Bulletin

July 2019



Have a Plan

If you support individuals in areas where wildfires are more likely or are occurring:

- Talk to the person's healthcare provider if they are in a higher risk group. Ask if certain precautions should be taken during poor air quality. For example, would it be safe for them to use an approved facemask?
- Have an emergency plan in place if the person you support and you need to leave quickly. See the [Emergency Preparedness Care Provider Bulletin](#).
 - Have emergency supplies ready, including back-up power sources for life-sustaining equipment and medications. Make sure all caregivers know how to operate the back-up power equipment and that it is tested regularly. See the [Life Sustaining Equipment Care Provider Bulletin](#).
 - Make sure emergency kits are tailored to the person's needs you support. For example, if individuals have special diets such as pureed food, include a manual hand blender or pureed foods with the emergency kit.
 - Include emergency phone numbers and make sure they are checked and updated regularly.
- Make sure the person has a clear, written plan that can be easily located and shared with others if you are not around.
- Practice the emergency plan regularly with the individuals you support. Everyone should know what to do.
- Review your evacuation plan. Do you have adequate means for transporting the individuals you support? Are you prepared to evacuate a client with special medical needs?
- Have a fire drill and practice getting out of the home. Are friends and family available farther away if you need to evacuate?
- Make sure enough care providers are in place to meet the needs of the individuals you support. Individuals with higher support needs may require more assistance during emergencies.
- Alert the local fire department if you support someone who will need extra care and assistance to evacuate during an emergency. They may be able to flag the person's address in their system to provide extra attention during an emergency.
- Sign up for [Smart 911](#), a service that allows you to create a safety profile so first responders can help faster during an emergency. You can also sign up for a vulnerable needs registry, which alerts emergency managers that special assistance is needed during a disaster.



Did you Know?

- Wildfires can start in an instant. The combination of drought, warm temperatures, high winds and excess dry vegetation make fire seasons more challenging.
- Individuals with disabilities need more support during a wildfire. Planning and being prepared can help save a life.
- Smoke from fires can cause serious health problems. Be aware of how to keep the person you support and yourself safe

Evacuations

- Fire conditions can change rapidly, causing evacuation levels to elevate from “1” to “3” without notice. When evacuations become necessary, local officials provide public information through the news media. In some circumstances, other warning methods, such as text alerts, emails or telephone calls are used.
- Understanding words used during evacuations allows you to take action when needed:
 - **Level 1: READY.** Current and projected threats from approaching fire(s) are severe. Prepare to leave the area. Local authorities (sheriff or emergency management) will ask area radio stations to broadcast periodic updates as conditions change. If conditions worsen, local authorities may attempt to contact you. If you are absent from your home for more than a short period of time, leave a note with contact information in a visible location.
 - **Level 2: SET.** Significant risk exists. You should self-evacuate. Approaching fire(s) may severely limit the ability of local authorities to provide emergency service protection. Dangerous conditions may threaten buildings. Fire and law enforcement working in the area will provide specific information about when to leave and the route to take. Local authorities will ask area radio stations to broadcast updates as conditions change. The Red Cross will not deploy to, or remain in, an area under a Level 2 notice.
 - **Level 3: GO.** Imminent danger exists and threatens your life and safety. You must leave now. Local authorities (sheriff or emergency management) will advise specific routes to take. If you do not leave, emergency services may not be available to assist you. No one will be allowed into the area until it is safe. Area radio stations will be asked to broadcast periodic updates.



Air Quality

Who is at Increased Risk?

Poor air quality may result from smoke created by a fire. Some people are more sensitive to poor air quality and may need extra help:

People with health conditions such as:

- Asthma, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, Chronic Respiratory Failure, diabetes, and other heart and lung diseases
- Respiratory illnesses and colds
- Stroke survivors
- Children under 18 and adults over 65
- Pregnant women
- People who smoke

Air Quality Conditions

Air conditions are classified as:

- **Good:** Air pollution is low and little health risks exist.
- **Moderate:** People with health conditions should limit spending any time outdoors and avoid strenuous outdoor activities. They may begin to have worsened symptoms.
- **Unhealthy for sensitive groups:** All sensitive groups should limit spending any time outdoors, avoid strenuous activities outdoors, and choose light indoor activities.
- **Unhealthy for everyone:** Everyone should stay indoors, avoid all strenuous activity, close windows and doors if it is not too hot, set air conditioning to recirculate, and use a HEPA air filter if possible.
- **Hazardous for Everyone:** People with heart or lung disease, or those who have had a stroke, should consult their healthcare provider about leaving the area and wearing a properly fitted respiratory mask if they must go outdoors. Follow burn bans and evacuation orders.

Symptoms that someone may be having problems from the air quality:

- Watery or dry eyes
- Coughing/wheezing
- Throat and sinus irritation
- Phlegm
- Shortness of breath
- Increased oral or nasal secretions
- Headaches
- Irregular heartbeat
- Chest pain

If the person you support or you experience serious symptoms, seek immediate medical attention.

Protecting those you support and yourself when there is smoke from fires:

- Check local air-quality reports and listen to news or health warnings for your community.
- Avoid physical exertion outdoors if smoke is in the air.
- If you or the person you support has asthma or other lung diseases, make sure to follow doctor's orders about taking medications. Follow your asthma management plan. Call a health care provider if symptoms worsen.
- Stay indoors and keep indoor air as clean as possible. Take the following steps when indoors:
 - Keep windows and doors closed. Track the air quality and open your windows for fresh air when the air quality improves. Pay attention to the heat indoors and follow guidance in the section below if it is too hot.
 - Run an air conditioner, set it to re-circulate and close the fresh-air intake. Make sure to change the filter regularly. If you do not have an air conditioner, consider leaving the area or going to an indoor place with air conditioning.
 - Use an air cleaner with a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter to reduce indoor air pollution. A HEPA filter will reduce the number of irritating fine particles in indoor air. A HEPA filter with charcoal will help remove some of the gases from the smoke. Do not use an air cleaner that produces ozone. For more information:
 - [Indoor Air Filtration Factsheet](#), Environmental Protection Agency
 - [California Certified Air Cleaning Devices](#)
 - [California's air cleaning devices for the home fact sheet](#)
- Do not add to indoor pollution. Do not use food boilers, candles, incense, fireplaces, or gas stoves. Do not vacuum unless the vacuum has a HEPA filter, because vacuuming stirs up particles already inside the home. Do not smoke, because smoking puts even more pollution into the air.
- Consider leaving the area if the air quality is poor and it is not possible to keep indoor air clean, especially if those you are caring for or you are having health problems or are in a sensitive group.
- Some people may benefit from using certain kinds of facemasks. See the [Wildfire Smoke and Face Mask factsheet](#).

Other Prevention Tips

- Make sure smoke and carbon monoxide alarms are on every level of the home. Test them monthly and change batteries at least once a year.
- Have fire extinguishers available and know how to use them.
- Learn how to protect a home from wildfire:
 - [Defend Your Home from Wildfire](#), Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
 - [How to Prepare Your Home for Wildfire](#), Smokey Bear
- Keep flammable objects (lawn mowers, oil or gas cans, propane tanks and woodpiles) at least 30 feet away from the home at all times.
- Check burn restrictions before lighting all fires.

Stay Informed About Wildfire Dangers

- A [Burn Risk Map](#) shows current information about wildfire danger in Washington, as well as restrictions for outdoor burning on DNR lands.
- The [Wildfire Public Information Map](#) shows wildfire locations.
- Check [air quality conditions](#) in your area with the Washington Department of Ecology. You can also check the federal [Environmental Protection Agency's](#) mobile app, Smoke Sense, which has information about smoke and health impacts in your location.
- Check the website for the county where you live and work. Many counties have messaging systems you can sign up for that will send alerts and warnings for different emergencies.

Sources:

Smoke from Fires, Washington State Department of Health (DOH), www.doh.wa.gov/Community-andEnvironment/AirQuality/SmokeFromFires/WildfireSmoke

Wildfire Smoke Factsheet: Indoor Air Filtration, US Environmental Protection Agency: www3.epa.gov/airnow/smoke_fires/indoor-air-filtration-factsheet-508.pdf

Smoke from Wildfires – Toolkit, DOH, www.doh.wa.gov/CommunityandEnvironment/AirQuality/SmokeFromFires/Smokefrom-FiresToolkits

Washington Air Quality Advisory, DOH, www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/4300/waqa%20info-graphic_English.pdf

Fire Danger and Outdoor Burning, DNR, <https://fortress.wa.gov/dnr/protection/firedanger/>

Smart 911, www.smart911.com/