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State issues air quality tips as multiple wildfires blaze

SANTA FE – The New Mexico Department of Health (DOH) and the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) urge the public to consider [current air quality](#) safety and preparation this week, in response to wildfires in several communities. The Hermit's Peak Fire, McBride Fire, Nogal Canyon Fire, and Big Hole Fire have forced evacuations and created smoke-induced air quality concerns.

“Air quality conditions exist that may be harmful to the health of at-risk populations and can create unsafe driving conditions in areas directly impacted by the fires,” said David R. Scrase, M.D. Acting Cabinet Secretary for the New Mexico Department of Health. “Smoke exposure can aggravate conditions such as asthma, a chronic lung disease, or cardiovascular disease.”

Based on current information from air quality monitoring systems, the weather conditions have pushed smoke from the ground to higher elevations, creating visibly hazy conditions that are compounded by blowing dust.

DOH and NMED encourage residents to protect themselves by learning more about available resources and ways to maintain air quality safety:

- Healthcare facilities, schools, businesses, and other gathering places should take steps to become clean air shelters or identify clean air shelters in the community. Home and community clean air shelters protect public health during wildfire smoke events.
- Replacing HVAC filters in air conditioners annually will help keep smoke out of buildings.
- Setting home air conditioning units to ‘recirculate’ during fire events will deter smoke from entering the house.
- Room-size air cooling systems that don’t utilize outside air can be used to cool the space while preventing hazardous air from entering.
- Improve indoor air quality during wildfire events with indoor air cleaners, including Do-It-Yourself air cleaners. Visit [Research on DIY Air Cleaners to Reduce Wildfire Smoke Indoors | US EPA](#) for guidance on how to make Do-It-Yourself air cleaners.
- Organizers of outdoor events and sports should be prepared to postpone activities if conditions become smoky. See the Safety Decision Making Toolkit available at [Environmental Public Health Tracking - Fire and Smoke](#).

- If you do not have an air conditioner and it is too warm to stay inside with the windows closed, seek shelter elsewhere (such as a cooling center, a relative's or a friend's home).
- Consider visiting public libraries, senior centers, and other public places that have air conditioning.
- For multi-day events, stay elsewhere until the air quality improves.

Since the Southwest typically has very low humidity, visibility is somewhat reliable to determine if it is safe to be outside when smoke is present. However, the potential for negative health outcomes from smoke exposure remains. Consult the [5-3-1 Visibility Method](#) at [Environmental Public Health Tracking](#) - Fire and Smoke to determine if local smoke events might impact your health. Residents are also encouraged to monitor local and statewide news for health warnings about smoke.

Although COVID-19 cases have decreased, be aware that being in indoor public spaces may increase your risk for COVID-19 exposure. If you have health conditions, are elderly, or are pregnant, consider wearing a mask if you must seek shelter.

NMED operates air quality monitors at multiple statewide locations, which gather information about air quality conditions to keep the public informed. This data can be tracked at [their website](#). Find additional wildfire and smoke resources at the [New Mexico Environment Department Air Quality Bureau](#) and more tips at [Heat Stress - Environmental Public Health Tracking](#).

NMDOH

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The Department of Health works to promote health and wellness, improve health outcomes, and deliver services to all New Mexicans. As New Mexico's largest state agency, DOH offers public health services in all 33 counties and collaborates with 23 Native American tribes, Pueblos and nations.