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DisasterPreparedness/2012-02

Wildfire Smoke Information

Smoke from wildland fires is a mixture of gases and fine particles from burning trees and other plant materials. Smoke can irritate eyes, aggravate respiratory systems and worsen chronic heart and lung diseases. When smoke levels are high, even healthy people may experience symptoms. Smoke can cause the following:

- Coughing
- Scratchy throat
- Irritated sinuses
- Headache
- Shortness of breath
- Worsening of asthma
- Chest pain or tightness
- Stinging or burning eyes
- Runny nose

Smoke may worsen symptoms for people who have pre-existing respiratory conditions, such as respiratory allergies, asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and heart disease by causing:

- Cough with or without mucus
- Chest discomfort or pain
- Wheezing and shortness of breath
- Rapid heartbeat
- Fatigue
- Inability to breathe normally

Protect yourself and your family and limit exposure from the harmful effects of wildfire smoke:

- Be aware of local air quality reports, listen and watch for news or health warnings about smoke and also be alert to public health messages about taking additional safety measures
- Air quality is a concern when the ground-level ozone is created with pollution and heated by the sun
- Ozone mixed with the high levels of floating tiny particles such as dust, soot, ash and smoke can lodge in the lungs and injure the heart
- Avoid prolonged outdoor activities, especially if you can see smoke outside or you feel the smoke's effects
 - Limit the time children and people with pre-existing conditions spend outdoors
- Stay indoors whenever possible and keep windows and doors closed
 - Use your air conditioner with a clean filter and the fresh air intake closed to prevent additional smoke from entering your home

- If there is no air conditioner and it is too warm to stay inside with the windows closed, seek shelter elsewhere
- Do not add to indoor pollution when smoke levels are high (burning candles, fireplaces or gas stoves)
 - Do not vacuum, since it stirs up particles already inside your home
 - Follow your doctor's advice about medicines and about your respiratory management plan if you have asthma or another lung disease, and call your doctor if your symptoms worsen
 - Do not rely on paper or dust masks for protection as these masks will not protect your lungs from smoke
 - “N95” mask, *properly worn*, will offer some protection

Information Sources:

www.eden.lsu.edu; www.fema.gov; www.ready.gov; www.bt.cdc.gov; www.redcross.org;
www.fs.fed.us

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