

# PROTECTING WORKERS FROM WILDFIRE SMOKE EXPOSURE



## THE DANGERS

- Irritation to the eyes, nose, throat and lungs, coughing, runny nose, headache, fatigue
- More severe symptoms: difficulty breathing, chest pain, increased heart rate, exacerbation of asthma.
- Increased risk of cardiovascular and respiratory diseases.



## WHAT WORKERS CAN DO:

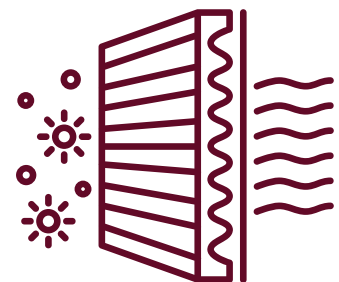
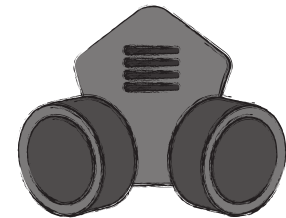


Monitor the EPA's Air Quality Index (AQI) at [AirNow.gov](https://www.airnow.gov), to learn current conditions in your workplace and community and [general recommendations for protection](#).

- An AQI of 100 or greater means risks for sensitive groups, including children, the elderly and anyone with a pre-existing respiratory or cardiovascular condition.
- An AQI of 151 or greater means breathing outdoor air is dangerous for everyone.

When the AQI shows risks for you and your co-workers, advocate with your employer for proper protections:

- Reduce, relocate or reschedule work
- Reschedule strenuous work – such as heavy lifting or long assignments outdoors – for a different time when air quality is less dangerous
- For those who must continue to work in health care, transportation, essential retail and other settings, employers should provide masks and respirators, along with training for proper fitting and use.
- Monitor workers for symptoms of exposure.
- Ensure paid sick time to any workers experiencing symptoms, which may include eye, nose, and throat irritation, coughing, runny nose, headache, fatigue, difficulty breathing, chest pain, increased heart rate and exacerbation of asthma.
- For those working indoors, employers must ensure that ventilation systems and air filters are maintained to remove smoke particulates. Central air conditioning systems should be equipped with at least air filters with a [Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value \(MERV\)](#) of 13 or above (MERV-13).
- Make sure there is a comprehensive plan in place for future wildfire smoke emergencies



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Overview of respiratory protection: Not all respirators and masks are effective against wildfire smoke

TYPE OF MASK OR RESPIRATOR	PROTECTION AGAINST PM 2.5 POLLUTION
P100	Strongest
N95	Strong
Well-fitted KN95 (head strap design)	Strong
KN95 (ear loop design)	Moderate
Loose-fitting N95/KN95	Weak
Cotton or cloth masks	Weak
Paper or surgical masks	Weak

Source: [StatNews.com](https://www.statnews.com)

## Laws that protect workers from wildfire smoke

California and Oregon have the only specific rule to protect workers from wildfire smoke. Washington has proposed rules. Under federal law, all employers covered by OSHA have a legal responsibility to provide a workplace free from recognized hazards, including hazards posed by wildfire smoke. And all workers, in all workplaces, have the right to join together and advocate and take collective action for safe working conditions.

