

Why is it a concern?

Smoke from wildfires can cause irritation of the eyes and airways, and lead to coughing, sore throat, and possibly irritated eyes and sinuses. Chemicals or other combustion by-products released from distant fires, while unlikely to cause significant health hazards, can contribute to headaches, nausea, and dizziness. Elevated concentrations of airborne particulate matter can trigger shortness of breath and/or wheezing in those who suffer from asthma, emphysema, or other respiratory ailments.

What you should know

To help gauge air quality, The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has developed the Air Quality Index (AQI) for reporting daily air quality. The AQI is based on five major air pollutants regulated by the EPA's Clean Air Act: ground-level ozone, particle pollution (also known as particulate matter), carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen dioxide. The goal of the AQI is to provide a consistent approach to reporting how clean or polluted outdoor air is. The AQI values range from 0-500 and in the event of a wildfire, an increased AQI is largely dependent upon airborne particulate matter. The higher the AQI value, the greater the level of air pollution and the greater the health concern. The table below outlines the AQI values and recommendations for sensitive groups.

Air Quality Index	Who Needs to be Concerned?	What Should I Do?
Good 0-50	It's a great day to be active outside.	
Moderate 51-100	Some people who may be unusually sensitive to particle pollution.	Unusually sensitive people: Consider reducing prolonged or heavy exertion. Watch for symptoms such as coughing or shortness of breath. These are signs to take it easier. Everyone else: It's a good day to be active outside.
Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups 101-150	Sensitive groups include people with heart or lung disease, older adults, children and teenagers.	Sensitive groups: Reduce prolonged or heavy exertion. It's OK to be active outside, but take more breaks and do less intense activities. Watch for symptoms such as coughing or shortness of breath. People with asthma should follow their asthma action plans and keep quick relief medicine handy. If you have heart disease: Symptoms such as palpitations, shortness of breath, or unusual fatigue may indicate a serious problem. If you have any of these, contact your health care provider.
Unhealthy 151 to 200	Everyone	Sensitive groups: Avoid prolonged or heavy exertion. Move activities indoors or reschedule to a time when the air quality is better. Everyone else: Reduce prolonged or heavy exertion. Take more breaks during all outdoor activities.
Very Unhealthy 201-300	Everyone	Sensitive groups: Avoid all physical activity outdoors. Move activities indoors or reschedule to a time when air quality is better. Everyone else: Avoid prolonged or heavy exertion. Consider moving activities indoors or rescheduling to a time when air quality is better.
Hazardous 301-500	Everyone	Everyone: Avoid all physical activity outdoors. Sensitive groups: Remain indoors and keep activity levels low. Follow tips for keeping particle levels low indoors.

How to protect yourself

When air quality is poor (AQI >101), it is important for sensitive populations to minimize time outdoors and reduce exertion levels. When feasible, outdoor activities should be rescheduled or shifted to less strenuous activities. If time must be spent outdoors when the AQI is poor or considered unhealthy, steps should be taken to limit the amount of time and level of activity while outside. Frequent breaks may be necessary and personnel could consider the use of a Filtering Face Piece (FFP) respirator (e.g., N95) to filter some of the particulate matter. It is important to note that an FFP does not remove chemicals found in smoke and are proven to provide protection only if properly fitted by a trained technician, but can provide limited particulate filtration for those sensitive to the smoke.

What to do if you see a fire on campus

1. Get to a safe location
2. Call 911 (Not the O.C.C.)
3. Give the dispatcher as much information as possible.

You may be asked to stay where you are, at your safe location, to guide emergency responders to the fire. If you feel comfortable using a fire extinguisher you can attempt to put out a small fire.

Resources

Additional information on the AQI can be found here:



<https://www.epa.gov/healthresearch/environmental-quality-index-eqi>

A helpful app with information on local fires: Watch Duty

