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Air Quality in Several Areas of the State to be Impacted by Two Wildfires
People Advised to Take Precautions to Prevent Illness

(Santa Fe) – Wind conditions in New Mexico Wednesday and Thursday are expected to circulate smoke from wildfires burning in New Mexico and Arizona that could cause unhealthy air quality conditions in several areas of the state through June 16. The New Mexico Department of Health and the New Mexico Environment Department are reminding residents to take precautions to avoid adverse reactions to the smoke.

Smoke from the Wallow and Horseshoe 2 fires burning in eastern Arizona and western New Mexico is expected along and south of Highway 60 in western New Mexico and from New Mexico's boot heel eastward along the southern border to near Carlsbad. Smoke from the Track Fire burning north of Raton is expected across parts of northeast New Mexico extending from the east slopes of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains to the northeast corner of the state to include Raton and Johnson Mesa. Additionally, smoke from the Loop Fire near Carlsbad National Caverns is impacting the city of Carlsbad and other parts of southeastern New Mexico.

“Even if you cannot see a wildfire burning in your area, the wind can bring smoke that can cause unhealthy conditions for you or your family, so it is imperative that all New Mexicans be aware of smoke and take the right precautions to avoid illness,” said Department of Health Cabinet Secretary, Dr. Catherine Torres. “Poor air quality conditions associated with smoke are especially important for people with underlying health conditions such as asthma, emphysema, and cardiovascular disease.”

Dr. Torres advises if symptoms associated with these conditions do not respond to the usual recommended medications, people are advised to see a health care provider immediately. Many air-conditioning units do not adequately filter out smoke particulates. The New Mexico Environment Department advises that the public should avoid using swamp coolers when the smoke levels are higher than normal. Most swamp cooler filters have filter pore sizes that are much too large to filter out smoke particulates.



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The Department of Health also recommends using a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter on air conditioners to reduce breathing problems. A HEPA filter may reduce the number of irritating fine particles in indoor air. When smoke levels are high, do not use anything that burns, such as candles, fireplaces, or gas stoves. Do not vacuum because vacuuming stirs up particles already inside your home.

The New Mexico Environment Department and the U.S. Forest Service operate air quality monitors at multiple locations around the state. The monitors gather information about air quality conditions and help to keep the public informed. Data from the Environment Department and Forest Service air monitors can be found at <http://www.nmenv.state.nm.us/aqb/WildfireSmokeResources.htm> and <http://www.wrcc.dri.edu/cgi-bin/smoke.pl>.

In areas without air quality monitoring equipment, visibility can serve as a good substitute in determining air quality. People should use the following guide to determine air quality from visibility: if visibility is 10 miles and up, the air quality is good; six to nine miles, air quality is moderate; three to five miles, air quality is unhealthy for sensitive people; one and a half to two and a half miles, air quality is unhealthy; one to one and a quarter miles, air quality is very unhealthy; and three quarters of a mile or less, air quality is hazardous.

The procedure for making personal observation to determine smoke concentrations is as follows:

- Face away from the sun
- Determine the limit of your visibility range by looking for targets at known distances. Visible range is that point at which even the high contrast objects totally disappear
- After determining visibility in miles, use the chart to determine the appropriate visibility category.

In areas of the state with poor visibility of three to five miles, people with heart or lung disease, the elderly, children, and pregnant women should avoid prolonged or heavy exertion and stay indoors as much as possible. If you have symptoms of lung or heart disease that may be related to excess smoke exposure, including repeated coughing, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, wheezing, chest tightness or pain, heart palpitations, nausea, unusual fatigue or lightheadedness, contact your health care provider. Also be sure you have the medicines needed for your chronic heart or lung problems.

For more information about recommended actions during smoke events and the health effects related to smoke from wildfires, go online to <http://nmhealth.org> under “What’s New.” For more information about fires in New Mexico go online to <http://nmfireinfo.wordpress.com>.

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