

NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
Secretary Catherine Torres, M.D.

NEW MEXICO ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT  
Secretary David Martin

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**Data Shows Poor Air Quality in Several Areas of the State due to Smoke from Wildfires**  
*Residents Advised to Take Precautions Against Smoke*

(Santa Fe) – The New Mexico Department of Health and New Mexico Environment Department reported today that air quality in several areas of the state is poor due to smoke from a wildfire burning in Arizona. The Department of Health is advising residents to take special precautions, especially sensitive groups such as the elderly, small children or any individuals with respiratory or heart problems.

The wildfires in Arizona are causing high levels of particulate matter in many areas of the state. Measurements tend to be higher in the evening hours and lower during the day. In Santa Fe on Monday night, particulate matter levels were measured at above 150 micrograms per cubic meter. Normally, particulate matter levels in Santa Fe are less than 10 micrograms per cubic meter. The Air Quality Bureau of the New Mexico Environment Department operates air quality monitors at multiple locations around the state.

“People should leave the area where the smoke levels are high until the smoke dissipates or stay inside as much as possible,” Department of Health Cabinet Secretary, Dr. Catherine Torres said. “If there is smoke nearby, remain indoors and close doors and windows to limit smoke inhalation.”

Dr. Torres said poor air quality conditions associated with smoke are especially important for people with underlying health conditions such as asthma, emphysema, and cardiovascular disease. The Department of Health 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.

The New Mexico Environment Department is reminding residents that many air-conditioning units do not adequately filter out smoke particulates.

“The public should avoid using swamp coolers when the smoke levels are higher than normal,” New Mexico Environment Department Secretary David Martin said. “Most swamp cooler filters have filter pore sizes that are much too large to filter out smoke particulates.”

Martin said the typical rule of thumb is if it smells like your swamp cooler is bringing in smoke from the outside, it's best to turn the unit off until the outside air quality improves. The same rule applies to automobile air-conditioning. The Environment Department recommends motorists to use re-circulated air instead of air-conditioning.

The U.S. Forest Service also operates 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://air.nmenv.state.nm.us> and <http://www.satguard.com/usfs/default.asp>.

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 one and a half to two and a half 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,” Dr Torres said. “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.”

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.

For more information about the health effects related to smoke from wildfires, go online to <http://nmhealth.org/eheb/index.shtml>. For more information about fires in New Mexico go online to <http://nmfireinfo.wordpress.com>.

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