

Protection from Wildfire Smoke - Do you smell that?!

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Posted by CSTC Staff

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CAL/OSHA has proposed and adopted a new emergency regulation known as section 5141.1. The new regulation is concerned with providing a safe work environment for outside workers when there is wildfire in the area and the current Air Quality Index (AQI) is 151 or greater. The concern here is that wildfires can produce particulate matter with a diameter of 2.5 micrometers, at this size it is too small for the body to filter out naturally. At they are known to filter down to the deepest recesses of the lung and can cause heart and lung health issues.

What do you need to do?

As the employer you need to provide training to employees who could potentially be exposed to hazards mentioned above. If the above conditions are met, you must provide employees with particulate

filtering respirators (N95, for example) and encourage them to wear it. Employees are not required to wear the respirators, but it is preferred they do.

However, do not use them if you have pre-existing heart and lung conditions as it can cause additional harm. Do not wear bandanas, dust masks or surgical masks as they do not protect the lungs from these particulates. Employees are also encouraged to inform employers if they suspect they are working around wildfire smoke.

Looking forward

There have been concerns that more can be done to help and protect those who are exposed to wildfire smoke. There have been recommendations to lower the AQI threshold to 100. This has not been adopted but is something to think about. Lastly, let's all make our best effort to prevent wildfires. It is believed that 85% of all wildfires are caused by unattended campfires.

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