



Josephine County, Oregon

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NEWS RELEASE

To: News Media

From: LuAnn Redding, Emergency Preparedness Coordinator

Date: September 6, 2017

Subject: **Guidance on Air Quality and Wearing Masks**

Grants Pass OR – Josephine County public health officials and the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) continue to urge residents to take precautions from wildfire smoke. Over the last week, air quality in Grants Pass and has been unhealthy to very unhealthy. As the Chetco Bar Fire continues to burn, air quality is expected to be a concern throughout Josephine County.

During a wildfire, Josephine County public health officials and DEQ advise residents to take the following precautions:

- Be aware of smoke concentrations in your area and avoid the places with highest concentrations.
- Avoid smoke either by leaving the area or by staying indoors and closing windows and doors.
- Avoid strenuous outdoor activity in smoky conditions.
- People exposed to smoky conditions and who suffer from asthma or other respiratory problems should follow their breathing management plans or contact their healthcare providers.
- Use high efficiency particulate air filters (HEPA filters) or electrostatic precipitator filters (ESP filters) if you can. These can help clean indoor air.

It is highly recommended that people stay inside and limit their outdoor activity. This is going to be your best defense in protecting your lungs from wildfire smoke.

People who must be outdoors may be considering the use of masks to help protect their lungs from wildfire smoke. Masks can create a false sense of security if not properly selected, fitted and used. Here are a few things you should know if you are considering the use of a mask:

- Avoid the use of surgical masks, bandanas and other common masks. These have not been shown to prevent smoke exposure.
- There are specialized masks that may prevent some smoke exposure.

- Most people will find it difficult to use these specialized masks, called particulate respirators, in a way that provides protection.
- Selecting the correct respirator size can be difficult.
- The fit of the respirator must be tested to make sure air does not leak around the sides. Leaking air means that exposure to smoke can still occur.
- Facial hair can cause the mask to not seal correctly.
- The masks can be uncomfortable. Even healthy adults may find that the increased effort required for breathing makes it uncomfortable to wear a respirator for more than short periods of time. Breathing may be even more difficult for those with heart and lung conditions.

Decisions on whether to use respirators or masks as personal protection for people who must work outside should be made with their employer.

- For more information on using the visibility index during wildfires:
<http://www.oregon.gov/deq/aq/Pages/Wildfires-Visibility.aspx>
- For information on smoke and wildfires in Oregon:
<http://oregonsmoke.blogspot.com/> For information on smoke and wildfires in California, visit <http://californiasmokeinfo.blogspot.com/>
- For more information about wildfires and health threats from wildfire smoke:
<http://public.health.oregon.gov/Preparedness/Prepare/Pages/PrepareForWildfire.aspx>

For more information, please contact the Josephine County Public Health Department at 541-474-5325. You may also contact Greg Svelund with the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) at 541-633-2008.

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