



Air Quality Safety

This summer, New York State has experienced air quality alerts due to, for the most part, wildfires burning in Canada. The smoke from these fires has blown down into our state and caused visible differences in the air. This has created air pollution, affecting our air quality, which potentially causes health problems. Local air quality can change from day to day, so it is important to monitor your air quality environment routinely. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) developed the Air Quality Index, or AQI, to make information available about the health effects of the five most common air pollutants and how to avoid those effects.

The five pollutants AQI is intended to monitor include ground-level ozone, particle pollution, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen dioxide. The index is divided into six categories, with each category corresponding to a different level of health concern. Each category also has a specific color, making it easy for people to quickly determine whether air quality is reaching unhealthy levels in their communities.

During the recent wildfires, the AQI alerted residents of the presence of particle pollution from the smoke and to exercise caution. Health concerns from the smoke include the inhalation of fine particulates that can reach deep into the lungs and cause lung and heart damage. These fine particles are respiratory irritants that cause coughing, difficulty breathing, and reduced lung function. Studies have found that short-term exposure to fine particles, a major component of smoke, is linked with aggravation of preexisting heart and lung disease.

Reduce and keep your employees safe from particle pollution exposure indoors and outdoors.

Outdoors

- To reduce how much smoke you inhale, lessen strenuous activity.
- Reference your local Air Quality Index at www.AirNow.gov.
- Use an N95 mask; a well-fitted mask can greatly reduce particulate exposure.
- Reduce smoke in your vehicle by utilizing the recirculation mode for the A/C.



Indoors

- Stay inside with the doors and windows closed. Utilize a high-efficiency filter in your A/C or heating unit.
- Do not add to indoor air pollution by burning candles, or using gas, propane, wood-burning stoves, fireplaces, or aerosol sprays. Do not fry or broil meat, smoke tobacco products, or vacuum.
- Use a portable air cleaner. Create a “clean room” with limited doors and windows.
- Have a supply of N95 respirators.
- When air quality improves, clean out your location and open windows to allow for ventilation, even temporarily.

Given that many air quality alerts affect specific regions and may only be for a short duration, it is important to reference local and national systems to monitor your specific environment. References include your county public health department, the NYS Department of Health, the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, and the Federal AirNow index. Be sure to sign up for phone or email alerts for immediate updates on current conditions.

References:

www.AirNow.gov

<https://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/34985.html>

<https://www.health.ny.gov/>