Bay Area Air District

News Release

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CONTACT: communications@baaqmd.gov

Air District urges Bay Area to prepare now for the 2026 wildfire season

Learn how to check local air quality, avoid exposure to polluted air and keep indoor air clean

SAN FRANCISCO – The Bay Area Air District is encouraging residents to prepare now for potential wildfire smoke impacts during the 2026 wildfire season. National and regional fire outlooks indicate near to above-normal wildfire potential across Northern California through much of the summer, driven by dry fuels, developing drought conditions and an active start to the wildfire season that is already impacting parts of the state.

"Wildfire smoke remains one of the most significant seasonal air quality threats facing Bay Area residents," said Dr. Philip Fine, executive officer of the Air District. "By signing up for air quality alerts now and knowing how to limit smoke exposure, we can be prepared to protect our health before the next wildfire impacts our region."

Wildfire smoke contains fine particulate matter or $PM_{2.5}$ and other pollutants that may aggravate heart disease, asthma and other respiratory conditions.

The best way for Bay Area residents to protect their health from smoke is to remain indoors with windows and doors closed, if temperatures allow. During warm days, put vehicle air conditioning units on recirculate to prevent drawing in smoky outside air. Consider using an air purifier that does not produce ozone to create a cleaner-air room in the home or a MERV 13 or higher filter for heating and cooling systems.

Residents can further reduce their exposure by observing these tips:

1. Stay informed on local air quality conditions. Sign up for Air Quality Incident Notifications and Spare the Air Alerts to get notified when wildfire smoke impacts the Bay Area. Real-time smoke pollution levels are available on the US EPA's Fire and Smoke Map.

2. During high heat and heavy smoke, keep indoor air cool and filtered or visit a Clean Air Center.

3. Weatherize the home by replacing or fixing old, leaky windows and doors. Use caulking to seal cracks and holes to prevent smoke from entering the space.

4. Consider using an air purifier that does not produce ozone to create a cleaner-air room in the home or a MERV 13 or higher filter for heating and cooling systems.

5. Set car ventilation systems to recirculate to prevent outside air from moving inside.

6. Avoid creating additional air pollution by curtailing activities such as wood burning, lawn mowing, leaf blowing, driving, barbecuing or other dust-producing activities.

7. For those who must be outside, consider wearing a properly fitted N95 mask. Bandanas and typical surgical masks do little to protect against smoke particles.

Smoke can irritate the eyes and airways, causing coughing, a scratchy throat and irritated sinuses. Elevated particulate matter in the air can trigger wheezing in those who suffer from asthma, emphysema or Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease or COPD. Pregnant people, older adults, children and individuals with heart or lung disease are particularly susceptible to elevated air pollution levels and should take extra precautions to avoid exposure.

For more information on preparing for and responding to smoke events, visit baaqmd.gov/wildfiresafety.

The Bay Area Air District is the regional agency responsible for protecting air quality in the nine-county Bay Area. Connect with the Air District via Facebook, X, Instagram and YouTube.

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Air District Communications Office
375 Beale Street, Suite 600, San Francisco, CA 94105
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