

WILDFIRE SMOKE AT WORK

It is not business as usual. Smoke is an occupational hazard, and the way work is carried out must change when air quality deteriorates.

1 IDENTIFY

IDENTIFY THE HAZARD

Wildfire smoke contains fine particles and gases. There is no specific safe-work threshold, so any exposure should trigger precautions.

Workers with disabilities (e.g.; heart or breathing conditions), pregnant or older workers, may require specific accommodations

2 ASSESS

ASSESS EXPOSURE + RISK

- Check the AQHI, forecast, duration and intensity of smoke.
- Consider physical demands, work location, HVAC and symptoms.
- Ask: What did the employer assess, and how will workers be exposed?

3 CONTROL

4 EVALUATE

CONTROL THE HAZARD — START AT THE TOP

PPE is the last line of defence, not the first response.

1 ELIMINATE / REDUCE

Suspend or reschedule outdoor work. Move tasks indoors. Limit time outside.

2 ENGINEERING

Close doors and windows. Improve HVAC filtration. Use HEPA air cleaners in designated cleaner-air spaces.

3 ADMINISTRATIVE

Monitor AQHI and forecasts. Avoid peak smoke. Reduce strenuous work. Increase cleaner-air breaks. Drink water regularly. Check in often; avoid working alone.

4 RESPIRATORY PPE

Use a properly selected, fit-tested N95 or better respirator when required. It filters particles, not toxic gases or vapours. Training on the care, use, and limitations of PPE matters.

EVALUATE Are controls working? Review symptoms, exposure and work changes — strengthen controls when protection is not enough.

WATCH FOR SYMPTOMS

Eye, nose or throat irritation • headache • persistent cough • wheezing • shortness of breath • chest tightness

STOP OR REDUCE ACTIVITY • MOVE TO CLEANER AIR • REPORT IT • GET MEDICAL HELP IF NEEDED



YOUR RIGHTS. EMPLOYER DUTIES.

Ontario law requires information, instruction, supervision and every reasonable precaution. A poor air quality response must be planned, communicated and evaluated.

OHSA 25(2)

EMPLOYER

Provide information, instruction and supervision; acquaint workers with hazards; take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances.

OHSA 27(2)

SUPERVISOR

Advise workers of actual or potential dangers and take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances.

OHSA 43(3)

WORK REFUSAL

A worker may refuse where they have reason to believe equipment, a thing, or the physical condition of the workplace is likely to endanger them or another worker.

BEFORE WORK STARTS

WRITTEN PROCEDURES MUST ANSWER:

- Who monitors air quality, and how often?
- What changes at each level of risk?
- Where is the cleaner-air break area?
- What symptoms require work to stop?
- Who do workers report concerns or symptoms to?
- How will higher-risk workers be accommodated?

IF WORK FEELS UNSAFE

A WORK REFUSAL IS A PROCESS

Advise your immediate supervisor if you feel unsafe about working in poor air quality. If they don't take steps to protect your health and safety, initiate a work refusal and reasons immediately.

Stay in a safe place and remain available for the investigation. Contact your union representative or worker JHSC member.

ASK THESE FIVE QUESTIONS TODAY

- 1 What is today's AQHI and smoke forecast?
- 2 What work has been moved, limited or rescheduled?
- 3 What cleaner-air space and ventilation controls are available?
- 4 What is the plan for strenuous work, breaks and working alone?
- 5 How do I report symptoms, request accommodation or raise a concern?

MORE INFORMATION

General health and safety information—
not legal or medical advice.

CUPE

cupe.ca/wildfire-smoke

CCOHS

ccohs.ca • search: wildfire smoke

ONTARIO OHSA

ontario.ca/laws