

## WILDFIRE SMOKE AND OUTSIDE WORK ACTIVITIES

On September 11, 2020 Oregon OSHA provided guidance on for employers who have employees working outside during air quality events created by the wildfires.

<https://osha.oregon.gov/news/2020/Pages/nr2020-34.aspx> Employers are responsible for providing safe and healthy workplaces, recognizing and addressing hazards to workers – including unsafe air quality that is expected throughout the week. The responsibility includes:

- Closing outdoor work activity when air quality in the area becomes “unhealthy,” or reaches an Air Quality Index of at least 151.
- Allowing workers with underlying health conditions to stay home.
- Re-arranging work schedules, hours and tasks in a way that enables workers to get relief from outdoor air.
- Providing N95 masks, where and when appropriate, and informing workers on their proper use and care.

Employers can check the state’s Air Quality Index (AQI) Map <http://oregon.environmental.gov/home/map> for air quality ratings at the beginning of a shift and should continue to check the site every hour into the shift to ensure workers are not working in “unhealthy” or worse conditions.

If outdoor work must be conducted when AQI is above 151, provide and require the use of a NIOSH approved N95 filtering facepiece respirator. To check if a respirator is approved by NIOSH the following link can be used to search for the manufacture, brand and model.

[https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/npptl/topics/respirators/disp\\_part/RespSource.html](https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/npptl/topics/respirators/disp_part/RespSource.html)

Only healthy workers should wear a respirator and anyone with an underlying issue related to their heart or lungs should get their doctors approval before using one. In all cases the manufactures instructions for use should be followed when using a respirator. N95 filtering facepiece respirators must be used correctly, with a tight seal on the face of the user. In order to obtain a tight seal, the user must be clean shaven where the seal of the mask meets the face. If the mask does not fit properly the worker will be exposed to hazardous smoke. Oregon OSHA has provided a YouTube link showing proper use of N95 filtering facepiece respirator.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ucmx\\_hj1SW8&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ucmx_hj1SW8&feature=youtu.be)

Smoke particles are very fine and a standard face covering used to reduce the risk of Covid 19 will not protect workers. As the majority of NIOSH approved N95 respirators have been re-directed to health care settings, these respirators are difficult if not impossible to find in short notice. Alternatives to a NIOSH approved filtering facepiece respirator include:

- The use of a reusable half face or full face air purifying respirator with N or P100 or N95 filters. If employers are requiring employees to use these respirators, employers must follow all requirements of Oregon OSHA’s respiratory protection standard including the use of medical screening, training and fit testing.
- Although not ideal, the use of Chinese made KN95 filtering facepiece respirators, if currently given an emergency use authorization by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for United States healthcare use for protection from Covid 19 may also provide protection from wildfire smoke. To check to see if a Chinese KN95 respirator has been accepted by the FDA use the link provided and located the mask on the list. <https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-emergency-use-authorizations-medical-devices/personal->

[protective-equipment-euas#appendixa](#) Be aware that a great number of unregulated and unapproved KN95 respirators are in the United States and these unregulated respirators are unlikely to provide adequate protection against wildfire smoke.

If N95 respirators are used for outside work during wildfire smoke be aware the workers heat exposure will increase (due to the use of the respirator), the worker will tire more easily and the worker may still experience burning eyes and other effects due to the exposure to the smoke. Employers should be sensitive to any worker having symptoms or health effects from wildfire smoke and should make accommodations, which should include suspending outside work activities.