

Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication Toolkit for Wildfires



Developed for Oregon Local Health Departments by the
Oregon Health Authority, Public Health Division
Health Security, Preparedness, and Response Program

**NOTE: This document replaces and supersedes
all previous versions of the communication toolkit for wildfires.**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Revision History 3

Introduction 4

Key Messages for Wildfires 5

Talking Points for WildFires 6

Sample Press Release #1 for Wildfires 8

Sample Press Release #2 for Wildfires 9

Sample Press Release #3 for Wildfires 10

Fact Sheets and FAQs for Wildfires 11

Webpages for Wildfires 12

Social Media Messages for Wildfires 13

Key Messages for Wildfire Recovery 15

Sample Press Release #1 for Wildfire Recovery 16

Sample Press Release #2 for Wildfire Recovery 17

Social Media Messages for Wildfire Recovery 18

REVISION HISTORY

Summary of Changes	Date	Point of Contact
First version created based on CERC phases	2013	Talia Gad, Kathleen Vidoloff
Post-2013 revisions based on evaluation survey; remove preparedness information; reduce pages from 72 to 20; requested relevant agencies and LHDs review revisions in early 2014; updated mask resources and guidance	2014	Kathleen Vidoloff, Theresa Watts

INTRODUCTION

The Risk Communication Toolkit for Wildfires has been designed to assist with messaging during and after a wildfire event. The most likely health impacts from a wildfire emergency include the following:

- Smoke irritation to eyes, throat and lungs
- Worsening respiratory symptoms in people with underlying lung disease such as asthma and pulmonary inflammation
- Heart attacks or irregular heart rhythm in people with underlying heart disease

In order to effectively and efficiently use the communication materials included in this Toolkit, you'll need the following items from your county's or tribe's communication plan:

- Media Contact List
- Local Partners Contact List
- Special Populations Agency List or 911 Card Registry
- Policies for Clearance
- Policies for Disseminating Messages

Also, for resources specific to wildfires, please refer to your local health department's emergency operations plan.

KEY MESSAGES FOR WILDFIRES

The Crisis Phase is characterized by uncertainty, shortened response time, and intense media interest. The public is seeking timely and accurate facts about what happened, where it happened, and what is being done to address the crisis. They will question the magnitude of the crisis, the immediacy of the threat to them, the duration of the threat, and who is going to fix it.

Communicators should be prepared to answer these questions as quickly, accurately, and fully as possible. Simplicity, credibility, verifiability, consistency, and speed count when communicating in the initial phases of an emergency.

**Goal: Provide up-to-date and accurate information to empower decision-making and prompt action**

- Provide available information on current event
- Explain the risks of this hazard
- Provide self-efficacy messages about safety and how and where to get more information
- Explain the process of what your local health department is doing

TALKING POINTS FOR WILDFIRES

REDUCING SMOKE EXPOSURE DURING A WILDFIRE

- **If smoke levels are very unhealthy or hazardous**, the best recommendation is to get out of the smoky area. If you have the means and ability to leave, getting out of the smoky area is the best thing you can do for your health.
- If you are not able to leave the area, reduce the amount of time you spend outdoors. People with heart or lung disease, infants and children are more sensitive to health effects from wildfire smoke, so leaving the area until the smoke clears is the best thing you can do for your health.
- If you have asthma, other lung disease, or heart disease, you may be more sensitive to health effects from wildfire smoke, **follow your doctor's advice about medicines and about your disease management plan**. Call your doctor if symptoms worsen.
- Go to Oregonsmoke.blogspot.com for the latest health and safety information about air quality and health effects. Oregon Smoke Blog has information from agencies and organizations helping with the wildfire response.
- **If you are told to stay indoors, stay indoors and keep your indoor air as clean as possible**. Keep windows and doors closed unless it is very hot outside.
- **Have enough food and medications** on hand to last several days. Minimize the amount of food that requires frying or broiling. This can add particles to indoor air.
- **Do not rely on dust masks for protection**. Paper "comfort" or "dust" masks commonly found at hardware stores trap large particles, such as sawdust. These masks will not protect your lungs from smoke. An "N95" mask, properly worn, may offer some protection.
- **Avoid strenuous work or exercise outdoors**. With the exception of firefighters and emergency personnel who are trained to work in hazardous environments, people should avoid physical exertion during smoke exposure.
- **Avoid driving** whenever possible. If driving is necessary, run the air conditioner on the "recycle" or "re-circulate" mode to avoid drawing smoky air into the car.
- **Which is worse: second-hand smoke from cigarettes or wildfire smoke?**
There are no comparable data for second-hand smoke from cigarettes and forest

fires. The 2006 Surgeon General report indicates there is no safe level of exposure to second-hand smoke from cigarettes. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicates that health problems from wildfire smoke depends upon how much smoke you are exposed to, how long you are exposed, your age, and your degree of susceptibility. The best thing to do is to limit your exposure to both.

WILDFIRE SMOKE AND MASKS

There are several drawbacks to recommending widespread mask use in an area affected by wildfire smoke. First, there is no evidence that simple surgical masks, bandanas, etc. have any benefit at all, so we might create a false sense of security. Second, NIOSH-certified N95 respirators might have some benefit if they are properly fit-tested and used correctly, but many people may not use the respirator correctly and won't understand the importance of having an airtight seal. As a result, masks, and even respirators, may provide little if any protection in this setting.

Therefore, it is important to communicate to the public not to rely on masks for protection from wildfire smoke.

For more information about effective masks and how to properly wear and choose a mask, visit:

CDC: Respirator Factsheet

<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2003-144/>

California Department of Health: Protect your lungs from wildfire smoke

<http://www.bepreparedcalifornia.ca.gov/Documents/Protect%20Your%20Lungs%20Respirator.pdf>

NIOSH

<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2010-131/pdfs/2010-131.pdf>

Oregon OSHA Voluntary use of respirator protection (for employers)

http://www.orosha.org/pdf/pubs/fact_sheets/fs05.pdf

Oregon OSHA General Respirator use (for employers)

http://www.orosha.org/pdf/pubs/fact_sheets/fs06.pdf

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE #1 FOR WILDFIRES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: [Name]
[County] County Health Department
Phone [(XXX) XXX-XXXX]
Email [email address]

High Temperatures and Smoky Air Could Cause Health Problems

[City, State] – County public health officials urge people across the state to take precautions as temperatures and air quality reach potentially unhealthy levels.

The National Weather Service is predicting weather that could bring prolonged wildfire smoke exposure to communities in the [region affected] area. Smoke levels can rise and fall depending on weather factors including wind direction.

“The combination of high temperatures and wildfire smoke in the [affected] area may increase the risk of illness especially for older adults, young children, and people with asthma, respiratory, or heart conditions,” said [Health Officer, position].

Public health officials urge all Oregonians to take the following precautions to avoid health problems during hot, smoky conditions.

- Be aware of smoke concentrations in your area. Residents can get the latest information by visiting the Oregon Smoke blog: Oregonsmoke.blogspot.com or call 2-1-1 Info.
- Avoid outdoor activities when air quality is unhealthy and hazardous. Those with heart or lung problems, as well as young children, are especially vulnerable.
- Avoid smoke either by leaving the area or protecting yourself by staying indoors, closing all windows and doors.
- Reduce other sources of indoor air pollution such as burning cigarettes and candles; using gas, propane, and wood burning stoves and furnaces; cooking; and vacuuming.
- Individuals with heart disease or lung diseases such as asthma should follow their health care providers’ advice about prevention and treatment of symptoms.

Helpful links:

[Oregon Smoke blog](#), for the latest on fires and air quality across the state

##

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE #2 FOR WILDFIRES
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: [Name]
[County] County Health Department
Phone [(XXX) XXX-XXXX]
Email [email address]

Wildfire Smoke Inhalation Prevention Information

The (INSERT FIRE NAME) is burning (ENTER LOCATION), has grown to (ENTER SIZE) and is (XX) percent contained. Hot, dry, and unstable weather will likely result in heightened fire activity and increased smoke production. The estimated containment date is (ENTER DATE). (NAME) County health officials are providing the following information to help local residents proactively avoid illness from wildfire smoke inhalation. People with respiratory or heart disease, the elderly and children, are advised to stay indoors. Poor air quality conditions are a health threat and should be avoided by all residents in smoky communities. Remember, local smoke levels can rise and fall rapidly depending on weather factors, including wind direction.

Take the following precautions to avoid breathing problems or other symptoms from smoke:

1. Be aware of smoke concentrations in your area.
2. Avoid outdoor exertion during such conditions. Avoid strenuous outdoor activity including sports practice, work and recreation.
3. Drink lots of water - staying hydrated can keep your airways moist which will help reduce symptoms of respiratory irritation such as scratchy throat, running nose and coughing.
4. Try to avoid driving in smoky areas. If you do need to drive in these areas, keep your windows rolled up and vents closed. If you need air conditioning, make sure you set your system on “re-circulate” to avoid bringing smoke into your car.
5. Avoid smoke by staying indoors, closing all windows and doors and use a filter in your heating/cooling system that removes very fine particulate matter.
6. People with concerns about health issues, including those suffering from asthma or other respiratory problems, should follow their breathing management plans; keep medications on hand, and contact healthcare providers if necessary.

Helpful links:

[Oregon Smoke blog](#), for the latest on fires and air quality across the state
[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) fact sheet about the health threats from wildfire smoke
[DEQ’s Wildfire smoke](#) website
[OHA wildfires](#) webpage

##

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE #3 FOR WILDFIRES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: [Name]
[County] County Health Department
Phone [(XXX) XXX-XXXX]
Email [email address]

Health officials urge residents to take precautions due to wildfire smoke

The Oregon Health Authority Public Health Division and the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality are offering Oregonians ways to identify poor air quality conditions and tips to stay healthy and safe during fire season.

Wildfires across the state are creating hazardous and smoky conditions. Smoke from fires in our region may begin to drift into **NAME** communities and rapidly degrade air quality.

"People with chronic lung or heart conditions, the elderly and children have higher risk of health problems from the fine particles in wildfire smoke," said Bruce Gutelius, M.D., M.P.H., deputy state epidemiologist with the Oregon Public Health Division. "People who suffer from asthma or other respiratory conditions should follow their breathing management plans, keep medications on hand, and contact health care providers if necessary."

DEQ and local county health departments urge residents to take the following precautions to avoid breathing problems or other symptoms from smoke:

- Be aware of smoke concentrations in your area and avoid the places with highest concentrations.
- Residents can check the current local air quality conditions on [Oregon Smoke blog](http://oregonsmoke.blogspot.com/) <http://oregonsmoke.blogspot.com/> or call 2-1-1 Info.. Avoid outdoor activities when air quality is unhealthy and hazardous.
- To avoid smoke either leave the area or protect yourself by staying indoors, closing as many windows and doors as possible without letting your home overheat, and using a filter in your heating or cooling system that removes very fine particulate matter.
- Avoid strenuous outdoor activity in smoky conditions. Young children and persons with heart or lung problems are especially vulnerable.

Persons suffering from asthma or other respiratory problems should follow their breathing management plans or contact their health care providers.

Helpful links:

- **Oregon Smoke blog**, for the latest on fires across the state:
<http://oregonsmoke.blogspot.com/>
- **DEQ's Air Quality Index**, for current air quality conditions:
www.deq.state.or.us/aqi/

##

FACT SHEETS AND FAQs FOR WILDFIRES

The following fact sheets are available for download. If your agency needs these documents in additional formats, please contact your [preparedness or hospital liaison](#). (Note: Click on button next to “Staff” to find your liaison).

Public Health and Wildfires FAQs (English)

http://public.health.oregon.gov/Preparedness/Prepare/Documents/OHA_2014_WildfireFAQs.pdf

Public health guidance for school outdoor activities

<http://public.health.oregon.gov/Preparedness/Prepare/Documents/2014PublicHealthGuidanceforOutdoorSchoolActivities.pdf>

Hazy, smoky air: Do you know what to do? (English)

http://public.health.oregon.gov/Preparedness/Prepare/Documents/OHA%208622_PublicHealthWildfiresFlyerfullpageEnglish.pdf

Hazy, smoky air: Do you know what to do? (Hay mucho humo en el aire: ¿Sabe que hacer? - Spanish)

http://public.health.oregon.gov/Preparedness/Prepare/Documents/OHA%208622_PublicHealthWildfiresFlyerfullpageSpanish.pdf

CDC Be Ready! Wildfires Infographic

http://www.cdc.gov/phpr/documents/BeReady_Wildfires.pdf

WEBPAGES FOR WILDFIRES

Oregon Smoke Information Blog

<http://oregonsmoke.blogspot.com/>

Oregon Public Health Wildfire Webpage

<http://public.health.oregon.gov/Preparedness/Prepare/Pages/PrepareForWildfire.aspx>

Northwest Coordination Center

<http://www.nwccweb.us/index.aspx>

InciWeb Incident Information System

<http://inciweb.nwcg.gov/>

Department of Forestry

<http://www.oregon.gov/odf/Pages/index.aspx>

Department of Environmental Quality

<http://www.deq.state.or.us/AQ/burning/wildfires/index.htm>

CDC Emergency Preparedness Wildfire Webpage

<http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/wildfires/index.asp>

SOCIAL MEDIA MESSAGES FOR WILDFIRES

Twitter Messages

The following messages can be posted on your local health agency's Twitter feed. All posts are 140 or fewer characters.

In addition to the suggestions below, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's @CDCReady and @CDCEmergency feeds can be retweeted as relevant information and links are tweeted.

#Wildfires are affecting air quality in [insert region]: <http://oregonsmoke.blogspot.com/>

Hazy air? Check DEQ's Air Quality Index before heading out:
<http://oregonsmoke.blogspot.com/> #wildfires

Use #wildfires to get the latest wildfire info, or check <http://oregonsmoke.blogspot.com/>

Populations sensitive to #wildfires smoke should limit outdoor activities.
<http://oregonsmoke.blogspot.com/>

Drink lots of water! Keeping hydrated minimizes health effects from #wildfires.

Stay safe from #wildfires. Visit <http://oregonsmoke.blogspot.com/>

Facebook Posts

A benefit to posting on Facebook is that conversations can be had among fans (although this can require additional moderation).

All of the above tweets can be cross posted as Facebook messages, but the following suggestions have images and links that can also be posted. For more suggestions, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/cdcemergency> to repost useful links, webpages, photos, and tips.

Wildfires are unpredictable and can quickly send smoke into Oregon communities. DEQ's Air Quality Index (AQI) is a color-coded tool which shows air pollution levels. Green is good, yellow is moderate, orange is unhealthy for sensitive groups, and red is unhealthy for all groups. <http://www.deq.state.or.us/aqi/index.aspx>

Need an excuse to avoid yard work? As smoky wildfire air persists, avoid strenuous outdoor activities. [Find](#) your community's air quality levels at the Oregon Smoke blog: <http://oregonsmoke.blogspot.com/>.

To protect yourself and your family from wildfire smoke, limit outdoor activities during poor air quality times. Check the Oregon Smoke blog for the latest information:
<http://oregonsmoke.blogspot.com/>

High smoke levels can have hazardous impact on health. People with respiratory or heart disease, the elderly, and children should follow their breathing management plans or contact their healthcare providers. Check the Oregon Smoke blog for the latest information: <http://oregonsmoke.blogspot.com/>

Hazy outside? Scratchy throat? People in smoky areas should drink lots of water. Keeping hydrated reduces the amount of smoke that can travel deep into your lungs. Check the Oregon Smoke blog for the latest information:
<http://oregonsmoke.blogspot.com/>

Do you bike to work? To reduce exposure to smoky wildfire air, bike commuters should avoid overly strenuous rides and stay hydrated. Consider taking public transportation. Check the Oregon Smoke blog for the latest information:
<http://oregonsmoke.blogspot.com/>

KEY MESSAGES FOR WILDFIRE RECOVERY

During the Recovery phase, information focuses on clean up, mitigation, recovery, and rebuilding efforts. Health risks to the public may also change during this phase. Communication and education efforts should focus more heavily on new or emerging risks and actions to mitigate those risks.



Goal: Provide information about ongoing cleanup, mitigation, recovery, and rebuilding efforts

- Increase public understanding of new and emerging risks
- Provide information and actions for risk avoidance behaviors and response behaviors
- Use the event as a “teachable moment” to highlight future preparedness messages

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE #1 FOR WILDFIRE RECOVERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: [Name]
[County] County Health Department
Phone [(XXX) XXX-XXXX]
Email [email address]

Indoor Air Quality after the [Insert Name] Wildfire

[City, State] – With the immediate danger from the [insert name] wildfire behind us, county public health officials urge residents near the fire zone to take precautions as air quality levels could still be affected.

Residents can take the following steps to protect their health from potential indoor air quality issues during clean-up and re-occupancy.

- Stay inside. Limit outdoor time of children and pets. Do not let them play around burned structures.
- Keep windows and doors shut.
- Wet all ash and debris thoroughly before packing inside a 6mm plastic sheet liner
- Clean and replace filters on air conditioning units and furnaces (set on “fan only”) as they become clogged.
- Stay hydrated. Be aware of high heat if your home is not air conditioned.
- An N95 particulate mask may worn to protect from smoke and ash dust.

Helpful links:

- [Oregon Smoke blog](#) for the latest on fires and air quality across the state
- [DEQ's Air Quality Index](#), for current air quality conditions
www.deq.state.or.us/aqi/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention tips for worker safety during fire clean-up

###

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE #2 FOR WILDFIRE RECOVERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: [Name]
[County] County Health Department
Phone [(XXX) XXX-XXXX]
Email [email address]

Critical Information for Residents to Prepare Homes and Reduce Risks

[City, State] – County public health officials are encouraging residents to take precautions and prepare their homes for the next wildfire season. As this wildfire season ends, residents are urged to take steps to prevent damage before the next wildfire strikes.

Public health officials urge that the following precautions be taken throughout the year to reduce wildfire damage to homes and property:

- Build or restock your emergency kit.
- Install and test smoke and carbon monoxide detectors on every floor of your home.
- Clear leaves and other debris from gutters, eaves, porches, and decks to prevent embers from igniting your home.
- Remove dead vegetation within the 30-100 feet surrounding your home.
- Prune large trees on your property so the lowest branches are 6 to 10 feet off the ground.
- When planting, choose native and less-flammable plants that are slow-growing. Please them in areas where they can be more easily maintained.

Helpful links:

- [Fire Adapted Communities](http://fireadapted.org/role/residents-and-homeowners.aspx?icid=home_rotator) provide steps to make your home safer:
- [Firewise Communities/USA](http://www.firewise.org/information/who-is-this-for/homeowners.aspx) helps communities prepare for wildfires:
- [U.S Fire Administration/FEMA](http://www.firewise.org/information/who-is-this-for/homeowners.aspx) safety outreach materials for wildfires

###

SOCIAL MEDIA MESSAGES FOR WILDFIRE RECOVERY

Twitter Messages

The following messages can be posted on your local health agency's Twitter feed. All posts are 140 or fewer characters.

In addition to the suggestions below, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's @CDCReady and @CDCEmergency feeds can be retweeted as relevant information and links are tweeted.

Use #wildfire to get the latest wildfire info or check the Oregon Smoke blog for the latest information: <http://oregonsmoke.blogspot.com/>

Hazy air? Check DEQ's Air Quality Index before heading out:
<http://www.deq.state.or.us/aqi/index.aspx> #wildfire

Drink lots of water. Keeping hydrated minimizes health impacts from #wildfires.

Is your family prepared for the next #wildfire season? Find out how to stay prepared.
<http://1.usa.gov/ZnLxuL> #wildfire

Returning home after a fire? Stay safe. Visit
[http://www.usfa.fema.gov/citizens/atf/for tips](http://www.usfa.fema.gov/citizens/atf/for_tips) #wildfire

Update or build your emergency kit.
<http://public.health.oregon.gov/Preparedness/Prepare/Pages/BuildAKit.aspx>
#wildfire

Facebook Posts

A benefit to posting on Facebook is that conversations can be had among fans (although this can require additional moderation).

All of the above tweets can be cross posted as Facebook messages, but the following suggestions have images and links that can also be posted. For more suggestions, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/cdcemergency> to repost useful links, webpages, photos, and tips.

Wildfires are unpredictable and can quickly reignite and send smoke into Oregon communities. DEQ's Air Quality Index (AQI) is a color-coded tool which shows air pollution levels. Green is good, yellow is moderate, orange is unhealthy for sensitive groups, and red is unhealthy for all groups. check the Oregon Smoke blog for the latest information: <http://oregonsmoke.blogspot.com/>

To protect yourself and your family from wildfire smoke, limit outdoor activities during times of poor air quality. Check the Oregon Smoke blog for the latest information:

<http://oregonsmoke.blogspot.com/>

Hazy outside? Scratchy throat? People in smoky areas should drink lots of water. Keeping hydrated reduces the amount of smoke that can travel deep into your lungs. Check the Oregon Smoke blog for the latest information:

<http://oregonsmoke.blogspot.com/>

For over 70,000 American communities wildfires are not a matter of if, but when. Do you live in a fire prone area? Talk to your neighbors, community and business leaders to find out what they are doing about wildfire preparation. Take responsibility for wildfire risk and become prepared today. To learn more visit <http://www.fireadapted.org>

After a disaster, such as a wildfire, you may feel sad, mad, guilty, or numb. This is a difficult time, but there are things you can do to help cope with the stress and stay healthy even during the cleanup time that follows. Visit

<http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/wildfires/afterfire.asp>

[BACK COVER]

[THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK]