



Missoula City-County Health Department

AIR QUALITY PROGRAM

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Missoula County Encourages Education, Preparation During Inaugural Wildfire Smoke Ready Week

As fire danger ticks up to very high and wildfire smoke begins to creep into the valleys, local public health experts, climate advocates and elected officials encourage Missoula County residents to educate and prepare themselves for the hazards of wildfire smoke during Wildfire Smoke Ready Week.

The Missoula County commissioners proclaimed July 12 – 18 as Wildfire Smoke Ready Week, and the City of Missoula will make a similar proclamation at their July 12 Council meeting. To help educate and prepare residents, a Missoula-area Wildfire Smoke Ready Team has organized a week of outreach and events about the risks posed by wildfire smoke and the simple strategies everyone can take to reduce their exposure and protect their health.

The team will post tips on social media (#WildfireSmokeReady), and volunteers will be at farmers' markets and other outdoor events to share options to create clean indoor air. Everyone is invited to engage with the team, share social media, and check out MontanaWildfireSmoke.org for more about this week's events and for information about portable air cleaners and filters, making your own air cleaner, using a forced air system to keep your indoor air safer, and coping with the double whammy of smoke and heat!

"We're excited to have a dedicated week to share what we've learned over the years about how to be 'Summer Smart,'" said Amy Cilimburg, Climate Smart Missoula's executive director. "As a team we have some fun things planned, including a special Smoke Ready Beer called Deep Breath! Look for our July 14 event at Imagine Nation Brewing where we ask the experts' about how to create clean indoor air and find out which beer of the future tastes better: Deep Breath or Smoked Out!"

Wildfire seasons have become longer and more severe due to climate change and forest conditions, and long-duration and extreme wildfire smoke events have become more common. This summer is already shaping up to be hotter and drier than average, and the National

Interagency Fire Center is predicting above-average, significant wildfire potential throughout our region. We may see more wildfire smoke than we have for the past few years.

“Climate change is a global issue, but the impacts are felt locally,” said Caroline Lauer, Missoula County’s climate resilience coordinator. “In Missoula, the science tells us that we’ll experience hotter and smokier summers, and our Climate Ready Missoula plan identified wildfire smoke as one of the most significant and urgent risks we face given climate change.”

Wildfire smoke is the most significant source of air pollution in western Montana and it is a serious health threat. Wildfire smoke exacerbates asthma and COPD, increases the risk of heart attack and stroke, increases susceptibility to infectious respiratory diseases and increases hospitalizations and deaths. Children, the elderly, pregnant people, and people with heart or lung disease are most at risk. Even if you are not in a high-risk category, wildfire smoke is bad for you, and the longer you’re in it, the worse it gets.

Fortunately, relatively inexpensive interventions, such as portable air cleaners and efficient HVAC filters, can mitigate many of the risks that wildfire smoke poses.

“Because wildfire smoke comes indoors, the old public health messaging of ‘shut your doors and windows’ is no longer sufficient,” said Sarah Coefield, air quality specialist with the Missoula City-County Health Department. “Folks need to take some simple proactive measures to filter their air. We’ve learned a lot about creating cleaner indoor air spaces since the 2017 wildfire season, and I’m excited to take part in this first-in-the-state Wildfire Smoke Ready Week to better prepare our community for what could be a gnarly smoke season.”

The approach of wildfire smoke season can be scary, but there are simple steps we can take to stay healthy. Let’s come together to prepare and get Wildfire Smoke Ready!

The Wildfire Smoke Ready team includes representatives from the Missoula City-County Health Department, Climate Smart Missoula, Missoula County Office of Emergency Management, United Way of Missoula County, Missoula County Fire Protection Association and Missoula County Sustainability.

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