

WILDFIRE SMOKE

Wildfire Preparation, Response and Recovery – Best Practices

Source: Various State, Federal and Local Agencies

Wildfires are the norm for California. Every year, California faces the threat of devastating wildfires that have the potential to claim lives, destroy property, and harm the environment. The effects of these statewide wildfires are widespread and devastating. Make sure you are well prepared before a possible event but also have spelled out your expectations for your stakeholders in the appropriate parts of your organization's Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) for preparation, response, and recovery.

PREPERATION/RESPONSE/RECOVERY PHASES

Before

- Review and update the “Recovery” Annex located in your EOP Functional Annex following current State and Federal “Best Practices” guidelines
- Locate and participate in the California Specialized Training Institute (CSTI) course, “Recovery from Disasters: The Local Community Role (G- 205)
- Identify and include your “whole community” in strengthening your Pre-Disaster Recovery framework

During

- Call 911 if you see a fire or flames.
- Activate and follow your Emergency Operations Plan.
- Use your internal Emergency Management Alert System to communicate with staff, students, parents, visitors, and the public.
- Always follow instructions from your local emergency agencies (Fire and Law Enforcement).
- If trapped, call 911 and give your location, but be aware that emergency response could be delayed or impossible. Turn off HVAC equipment (even if the power is already out) and natural gas. Turn on lights to help rescuers find you if you have power. If your site has an emergency response kit, locate the glow sticks, and activate them one at a time for as long as they last. Fill sinks and tubs with water and keep windows and doors unlocked.
- Ensure you have a representative designated to be in contact with your local Emergency Operations Center (EOC. There may be a County Schools representative set up as a liaison at the EOC for your site/district.
- If your site is a designated shelter or evacuation point, follow the instructions of the organization or agency that is managing the site (i.e.: American Red Cross).
- Follow the Cal/OSHA Protection from Wildfire Smoke regulation, Title 8, Section 5141.1 for protection for employees and use of N95 respirators https://www.dir.ca.gov/title8/5141_1.html.

This information on the RiskAdvisor website is intended to assist AP Keenan's clients in identifying and reducing certain loss exposures. It is not possible for us to identify all potential sources of liability or to offer a fail-safe mechanism for dealing with them. AP Keenan offers no guarantee that clients will recognize any financial savings or improved loss experience as a result of the information and suggestions presented here.

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- You can find resources on wildfire smoke safety in this Cal/OSHA link as well. <https://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/Worker-Health-and-Safety-in-Wildfire-Regions.html> and <https://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/wildfire/Worker-Protection-from-Wildfire-Smoke.html>
 - Monitor the Air Quality Index (AQI) at www.airnow.gov and enter the zip code of the location where you will be working. The current AQI is also available from the U.S. Forest Service at <https://tools.airfire.org/> or your local air district at www.arb.ca.gov/capcoa/dismap.htm.
 - Listen to Emergency Alert System (EAS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Weather Radio, or local alerting systems for current emergency information and instructions.
 - If you are not ordered to evacuate but smoky conditions exist, stay inside in a safe location, or go to a location where smoke levels are lower, if possible.
 - Avoid vigorous activities outdoors and if traveling in a vehicle in the areas affected, close windows and make sure air is on “re-circulate” mode.

After

- Activate your Continuity of Operations Plan (EOP – Functional Annex) and continue to follow your EOP Recovery Annex.
- Listen to authorities to find out when it is safe to return and whether water is safe to drink.
- Avoid hot ash, charred trees, smoldering debris, and live embers. The ground may contain heat pockets that can burn you or spark another fire. Consider the danger to pets and livestock.
- Avoid downed power lines.
- Send text messages or use social media to reach out to family and friends. Phone systems are often busy following a disaster. Make calls only in emergencies.
- For those that are part of the damage assessment team, ensure training on personal protective equipment (PPE) use is conducted.
- Continue to monitor the Air Quality Index (AQI) at www.airnow.gov and enter the zip code of the location where you will be working. The current AQI is also available from the U.S. Forest Service at <https://tools.airfire.org/> or your local air district at www.arb.ca.gov/capcoa/dismap.htm.
- Contact your insurance company/insurance pool/JPA for assistance.
- Document everything you do related to the fire. For more details on this process, refer to the IMReady FEMA Disaster Assistance document.
- Wildfires dramatically change landscape and ground conditions, which can lead to increased risk of flooding due to heavy rains, flash flooding and mudflows. Flood risk remains significantly higher until vegetation is restored — up to 5 years after a wildfire. For more details refer to the Flash Flooding After Wildfires document.
- Be prepared to provide emotional and wellbeing services and resources for students, staff. Mental and physical fatigue are common in these situations.
- <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/wildfires/afterfire.html>, <https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/index.asp> and www.NCTSN.org.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND CHALLENGES

Indoor Air Quality – Maintain good indoor air quality by changing HVAC air filters frequently and changing to a higher efficiency filter (one that can be used safely in the existing HVAC system). Check with the manufacturer on what is the maximum filter rating your system can handle. Make a request through your insurance company/TPA for guidance to ensure indoor air quality meets standards for occupancy. Cal/OSHA has information on how to protect indoor workers from wildfire smoke - [Protecting Indoor Workplaces from Wildfire Smoke with Building Ventilation Systems](#).

When to close or re-open a site - There is no statewide air quality standard on when to close a site or facility. The decision is left to the individual organization and must follow organizational policies and administrative regulations. The senior executive, often after consultation with their governing body and management team, may decide to close or reopen a facility. It is recommended that the senior executive within the affected area discuss whether to close or reopen sites. The organizations should coordinate efforts on when to close and/or re-open facilities.

Follow state and local guidelines on reopening sites and facilities after a wildfire. There are many factors that may impact transportation safety and other operational safety related measures. For schools, the CDE has Wildfire Recovery Frequently Asked Questions which include what to do before you can reopen and how to maintain good air quality in the buildings and how to submit a waiver material decrease request.

Drinking water supply system contamination – boil water or use your emergency water supply until you get clearance from your water supply agency.

Stay Safe After a Wildfire – CDC - <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/wildfires/afterfire.html>.

Fire ash, debris, hazardous waste cleanup and removal – It is recommended that you contract out these services, if possible.

Right of Entry – Follow local authority’s recommendations.

What documentation is needed to be a shelter or a command center? - Documentation would include a contract/agreement with Red Cross for the shelter and Fire or Law Enforcement for the command center. This is something that was likely created during the disaster preparation phase and outlined in your EOP.

Who can request buses and staff to provide transportation? - Requests for transportation should be coordinated through the Local or County OES. Ensure documentation of mileage, employee hours, and fuel are tracked.

How to manage monetary donations, relief funds and GoFundMe accounts – Notice of monetary donations needs to be communicated to those with authority to oversee monetary donations such as District CBO, VP of Administration/Fiscal Services, District Foundations, Finance Director/Manager, or the City Manager. These activities must be tracked.

Do you provide N95 respirators to staff, students, patients, and visitors - Refer to the Cal/OSHA Protection from Wildfire Smoke regulation, Title 8, Section 5141.1 for protection for staff and the use of N95 respirators. https://www.dir.ca.gov/title8/5141_1.html. Additional resources on wildfire smoke safety for staff and updates on the use and supply of N95 respirators can be found on the al/OSHA Wildfire Smoke webpage <https://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/Worker-Health-and-Safety-in-Wildfire-Regions.html>.

Cal OSHA's Frequently asked questions on use of N95 respirators can be found [here](#). Cal/OSHA information on [Using Disposable Respirators](#) is available in English and Spanish.

For information on supplying N95 respirators to students, patients, and visitors, contact your local health department and CDE for guidance.

The CDC has guidance to help reduce exposure to wildfire smoke during COVID-19 pandemic. https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/covid-19/reduce_exposure_to_wildfire_smoke_covid-19.html and <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/wildfires/index.html>

Individual Preparation

Having enough stuff in your vehicle during a crisis or disaster can make a big difference in not just comfort, but possibly survival. Since most of us have our automobiles nearby, putting together a 'Go-Bag' and making it a regular part of our auto equipment is very important. Make sure you keep perishable foods, water, and batteries up to date. We're on the 'Go' a lot in California, so why not be prepared and keep a 'Go-Bag' loaded in our vehicle?

A 'Go-Bag' can be a soft-sided sports bag or even a plastic or cardboard storage box. The minimum inventory for an automobile 'Go-Bag' should include:

- Extra clothing (sweat suit or coveralls are excellent)
- Comfortable walking shoes (sturdy tennis shoes or boots, including socks)
- Flashlight with batteries (don't store the batteries in the flashlight)
- Safety road flares
- Battery-powered AM/FM radio (or wind-up) but don't store the batteries in the radio
- Small first-aid kit
- Bottled water (5 days' worth = 1 gallon per day, per adult) for drinking and hygiene
- Non-perishable finger foods (dried fruit, jerky, cookies, trail mix, etc.)
- Hat, windbreaker, and gloves with leather palms
- Blanket or bedroll
- Critical medication
- Personal toiletries (include an extra roll of toilet paper)
- An extra set of undergarments

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- A small box of 10-gallon plastic garbage can liners (for sanitation purposes)
 - A copy of the ICS 214a “Individual Log” and other role-specific supplies for Emergency Management team member.

Also, it is a good idea to remember the “The 7 Ps”

- People
- Pets
- Personal computer
- Prescriptions/Pills
- Papers
- Photos
- Phone (and charger)

Additional Items

- Personal N95 masks
- Purse
- Pillow
- Peripherals (external back up hard drive)
- Personal address book (paper version)
- Positive attitude while on the road