

During the summer months there may be periods where the local air quality is affected by wildfire smoke from other regions. The information on this page provides guidance to campus on measures to help minimize exposures and health risks primarily as it relates to wildfire smoke, and particularly for those workers who work outdoors.

MINIMIZING EXPOSURE

Unit supervisors and their workers should take the following proactive steps to minimize exposure before starting work activities:

- Monitor [air quality advisories](#) to determine any adjustments to strenuous activity levels.
- Reduce contact with the smoky environment as much as possible, and adjust work schedules as appropriate.
- Reduce the level of physical activity depending on the air quality and the worker's own health condition and susceptibility to symptoms.
- Consider the use of an N-95 respirator for workers who are required to work outdoors during smoky periods as an added level of protection. Supervisors must ensure that workers have been fit-tested for the respirator they are using, and that they are trained on its use and care.
- Follow the tips for [heat stress prevention](#) (e.g. staying hydrated) during periods of hot weather that may be occurring at the same time as a smoky environment.

SYMPTOMS & REPORTING

- WorkSafeBC advises that for most individuals smoke exposure can cause irritation of eyes, nose and throat, including headaches and worsening of allergies. These symptoms will generally resolve quickly in healthy workers if the exposure to smoke is short-term.
- For those individuals with respiratory illnesses, chronic diseases, or pregnant women or older adults, they may experience more serious or acute symptoms to smoky conditions and should advise their supervisor ahead of time if they have medical restrictions affecting their work.
- Any workers who begin to experience symptoms due to wildfire smoke or other outdoor pollutants should report them to their supervisor to ensure appropriate actions are taken before symptoms worsen. Anyone who experiences severe symptoms should receive first aid and medical attention immediately by calling Campus Security (250-721-7599).

AIR QUALITY HEALTH INDEX (AQHI)

The [BC AQHI](#) provides regular updates to air quality based on a combination of air pollutants, including particulates from smoke. The AQHI Index provides a scale from 1-10+ (1 being a low health risk and 10+ very high). The AQHI for Victoria, BC, is available at this link.

During periods where the AQHI is moderate, high, or very high, individuals should also modify their activities according to the [advisory health message chart](#) which typically involves adjustments to outdoor strenuous activity levels and work scheduling, depending on your health condition.

MONITORING

The university will monitor the AQHI, and during periods where it is high or very high (7-10+) will review potential impacts to campus activities and provide appropriate advisories or guidance for the campus community. Typically when the AQHI is above 7, it is usually because of high concentrations of smoke particles in a region.