

Tools for Life – Weekly Health & Safety Meeting



Home Healthy - Home Safe

August 2021

Wildfire Smoke

Last month, Washington and California issued emergency temporary standards to prevent worker exposure to wildfire smoke. The primary hazardous component of wildfire smoke is particulate matter that is less than 2.5 microns in size (known as PM 2.5). PM 2.5 is also the main component of air pollution. The new standard requires Apollo to prevent employee exposure to PM 2.5 during the course of working outdoors when the air quality index is above 151. While these rules apply to all Washington and California job sites, they also serve as a best practice guidance for all other locations that experience poor air quality.

This new procedure (AISH 43) includes these key points:

1. Supervisors must monitor the Air Quality Index (AQI) when poor air quality is predicted. There are several resources including the weather app on your smart phone. The AQI is updated hourly. If you need a different source for Air Quality Index contact your Health and Safety Manager.
2. Supervisor must implement a 2 way communication system to keep employees informed of the AQI and any needed protective measures.
3. When the (AQI) reaches 69, conduct mandatory Hazard Communications training on the health hazards of wildfire smoke/PM 2.5. This training must be conducted annually. Supervisor should offer N-95 or better to workers.
4. When the AQI is at or above 151, Apollo is required to alert employees and implement exposure controls. Preferably we will relocate work or change the schedule to a place and time with a lower concentration of PM 2.5. If that is not possible, then supervisor is required to offer N-95 or better filtering facepiece respirators. Workers are strongly encouraged but not required to use these on a voluntary basis. Workers will be in charge of storing and maintaining the respirators. N-95's should be replaced as often as necessary so they do not become a health hazard to the user. When using this type of respirator, fit testing and medical clearance does not apply. Training is required in accordance with Appendix B of the WAC or if you are outside of Washington, Appendix D of the OSHA respiratory standard.
5. If workers show signs or symptoms of illness due to PM 2.5, seek medical assistance.

There are many hazardous chemicals in wildfire smoke and air pollution, but the main harmful pollutant is the particulate matter (PM 2.5). The PM 2.5 can irritate the lungs and cause persistent coughing, phlegm, wheezing or difficulty breathing. PM 2.5 can cause more serious problems such as reduced lung function, bronchitis, heart failure and even early death.

People with pre-existing health conditions (cardiac disease, COPD, and those sensitive to air pollution are more susceptible to adverse health effect from PM 2.5. Some workers may experience health problems at lower AQI levels and may need to take earlier action to reduce exposure.

HEALTH REMINDER: While you sleep, blood flow increases to your muscles so the body can repair itself. After exercise or hard physical labor, your body needs more sleep, because you have more damage to repair.

Discussion Points / Question:

1. Why is wildfire smoke a health hazard?
2. What are 2 things Apollo is doing to protect workers from Wildfire Smoke?
3. Who is required to comply with the AISH 43 procedure?