**2016 Wildfire Talking Points: Smoke**

* Heavy smoke from wildfires can threaten public health and safety.
* Wildfire smoke can reduce visibility on roadways and aviation travel routes. This limited visibility increases the risk for firefighters working along these corridors and causes safety issues for the public attempting to travel through these areas. Reduced visibility from smoke is especially a concern in the Southeast where "whiteout" conditions can occur when smoke is combined with low wind speeds and high humidity. People should exercise care when driving in smoky, low-visibility conditions.
* Older adults, children and people with heart or lung disease (including asthma) are more vulnerable to the adverse health effects of air pollution from wildfires. Recent science indicates that pregnant women are also potentially vulnerable to adverse health effects of air pollution from wildfires both as individuals and the potential for adverse effects to their fetus. These sensitive groups as a whole are at greater risk to lower levels of air pollution as compared to healthy individuals. Sensitivity to smoke varies significantly between individuals and a health care provider can help address one’s vulnerability to smoke.
* If an area is at high risk of wildfire due to drought conditions, sensitive individuals may wish to prepare in advance for likely smoke impacts. Such preparations could include: developing a written asthma management plan for those with asthma and for people with heart disease, checking with their local health department or health care providers about precautions to take during smoke events.
* If heavy smoke is present, those who are more vulnerable should take precautions such as staying inside and avoiding prolonged outside activity. Your own body and its response is the best indicator of response to the smoke. People should keep in mind that smoke impacts can change quickly. Contact a health care provider if your condition worsens when you are exposed to smoke.
* If heavy smoke or long duration smoke from a wildfire is forecasted for your area, sensitive or more vulnerable individuals may consider leaving the area. If one stays in the area, it is recommended to reduce exposure to the smoke by staying inside with an adequate supply of medication (more than 5 days) and food. In advance of the smoky conditions, establish a clean air room or home conditions which maintain clean air by using HEPA filters on air conditioners which recirculate inside air (not pulling in smoky outside air) or use of HEPA clean air filtering devices. It is always advised for sensitive individuals to consult their healthcare provider for evaluation of their best course of action and appropriate protective measures.
* Wildfire smoke can adversely affect recreation and tourism opportunities in locations such as Wilderness Areas and others scenic locations.
* On long duration or high impact smoky wildfires, a technical specialist position identified as an Air Resource Advisor, may be utilized to aid in addressing air quality issues related to the wildfire smoke and to aid with interagency coordination in helping to address public concerns.
* Emergency smoke monitors are available as part of the Forest Service’s Wildland Air Quality Response Program and they may be deployed in areas which don’t routinely have air quality monitoring. For the latest information on air quality monitoring in your area, consult with the local or state air agency and if a monitor is deployed by an Air Resource Advisor, the data will also be available to the public along with the local smoke forecast which is typically posted on the state smoke blogspot if one is established.
* Fire plays an important ecological role across the wildlands of the United States and with fire, smoke is always present. Prescribed fire is a valuable land management tool used to reduce the risk and severity of wildfire and meet other resource management objectives such as maintaining habitat for endangered species. As compared to wildfires, prescribed fires are shorter in duration and are conducted under weather conditions to minimize the impacts of smoke on the public.
* When air quality impacts of the wildfire are considered when determining strategies and tactics, such as use of an Air Resource Advisor or other tools, it should be noted to the public.
* Resources that the public can use to learn about the specific air quality impacts in their area are available through EPA’s AirNow site ([airnow.gov](http://www.airnow.gov)), state and local air agencies, public health agencies and the local National Weather Service as well as from the Air Resource Advisor if one is assigned to the fire.