



Wildfire Smoke Protection Emergency Rule Now in Effect for California Employers

An emergency regulation requiring California employers to protect employees from potential harm due to wildfire smoke went into effect in July of 2019. This is the first standard of its kind requiring employers in California to protect their outdoor workers from potentially unhealthy smoke created by wildfires.

Adopted by the Cal/OSHA Standards Board on July 18, the emergency rule requires employers to monitor the Air Quality Index (AQI) in the workplace and take steps to protect workers when the AQI reaches certain levels:

- Identify harmful exposure levels from wildfire smoke before each shift and periodically after that by checking the AQI where workers are located.
- Reduce exposures, if possible, by relocating work to an enclosed building with filtered air or an outdoor area with a safer AQI level.

Based on how the rules read, the employer is responsible for checking the forecast before the crews go out and provide N95 respirators. When the air quality index exceeds 151, crews should be relocated until the levels stabilize.

If employers cannot reduce workers' exposure to harmful wildfire smoke below AQI of 150 for particulate matter 2.5 (PM2.5), they must provide N95 respirators to all employees for voluntary use and train workers on their safe use and maintenance. Additionally, they must educate workers on the new regulation and the health effects of wildfire smoke.

In extreme situations where the AQI for PM 2.5 is 500 or higher, they will require mandatory wear of the N95 masks and fit testing of those masks. Cal/OSHA indicated that reaching these levels is very rare.

Further information can be accessed through the links below.

- **Cal/OSHA Standard Details:** <https://www.dir.ca.gov/title8/5141.1.html>
- **Emergency Action Information:** <https://calchamberalert.com/2019/08/02/wildfire-smoke-protection-emergency-rule-now-in-effect-for-california-employers/>
- **Air Quality Website:** https://airnow.gov/index.cfm?action=airnow.local_state&stateid=5&mapcenter=0&tabs=0

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