



# SMOKE PREPAREDNESS



Wildfire smoke can make anyone sick, but people with asthma, lung disease/ Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) or heart disease, as well as elders, children, pregnant women and anyone breathing smoke for an extended time, are especially at risk. Prepare for smoke and take action when the air is unhealthy.

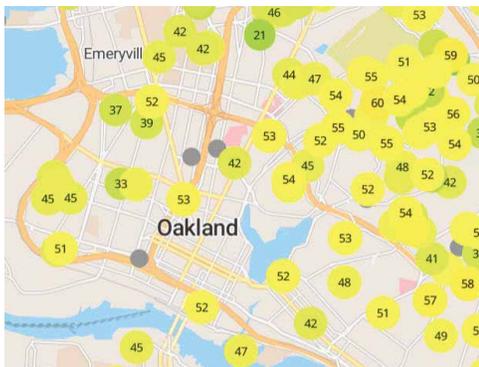
## AIR QUALITY INDEX

The Air Quality Index, or AQI, is the EPA’s system used to report when air pollution is at dangerous levels. The AQI measures particulate matter (measured in microns, e.g. PM2.5), ozone (smog) and other air pollutants.

While not a perfect measure of pollutants in the air, it does provide a general indication of the health hazard. The AQI ranges from 0 for the cleanest air up to 500 for air pollution levels that pose an immediate danger. An AQI over 100 is generally considered unhealthy air to breathe, especially for an extended time.

Air Quality Index (AQI) Values	Levels of Health Concern
0 to 50	Good
51-100	Moderate
101-150	Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups
151-200	Unhealthy
201-300	Very Unhealthy
301 to 500	Hazardous

## HOW DO I KNOW WHAT MY LOCAL AQI IS?



The EPA’s website AirNow ([www.airnow.gov](http://www.airnow.gov)) displays the AQI for an address or Zip code entered. This site also provides a 7-day AQI forecast.

An AC Alert ([www.acgov.org/emergencysite/](http://www.acgov.org/emergencysite/)) or Spare the Air Alert may be sent out during poor air quality periods.

There are also air quality sensors that can be purchased for inside and/or outside the home. PurpleAir is one popular model ([www.purpleair.com](http://www.purpleair.com)), and you can check PurpleAir readings from local sensors using their free online map, as shown.

## WHAT CAN I DO TO PREPARE FOR UNHEALTHY AIR?

Here are some steps that you can take to help prepare for unhealthy air such as from a wildfire:

- ❖ If you are at-risk (e.g. have asthma or lung or heart disease, are an older adult, are pregnant or have children), talk with your doctor about whether and when you should leave the area.
- ❖ Make sure that the filter in your heating/cooling system is not overdue for replacement. A high-efficiency filter (HEPA or MERV 9-13) is recommended to trap the most small particles.
- ❖ Consider a high-efficiency electronic air cleaner such as an ozone-safe electrostatic precipitator. If you can’t have one for each room then at least have one where you spend the most time, including sleeping. You can also make a less expensive but still effective air filter box, see below.
- ❖ Have plenty of quality N95-type masks or a P100 respirator and extra filters on-hand.
- ❖ Stock up on food that doesn’t require cooking in order to reduce indoor air pollution.
- ❖ Know where local cooling/respice shelters are located, for example at a library or senior center.

## THE AQI IS HIGH, HOW DO I RESPOND?

When the outside AQI is high and the air unhealthy, for example from a wildfire, there are some steps that you can take to reduce your exposure and health risk:

- ❖ If you have asthma or lung or heart disease, make sure that you follow your doctor's directions about taking your medicines and following your management plan.
- ❖ If you have trouble breathing or any other signs of a serious medical issue, call 9-1-1.
- ❖ Stay indoors as much as possible, ideally in an area with filtered air. Use your air cleaner or filter box. Close windows and doors to limit smoke from entering. Make sure that your heating/cooling system is set to recirculate so not to draw in outside air, same with your vehicle's fan if driving.
- ❖ If you have to be outdoors, limit your level of exertion and wear your N95 mask or P100 respirator. Make sure that it fits properly. A bandanna will not protect you from wildfire smoke.
- ❖ Monitor the outside AQI for worsening conditions. While smoke from very a distant wildfire can be present, be sure that any smoke is not from a nearby wildfire that could be a direct threat.
- ❖ If you cannot stay indoors due to excessive heat or other dangerous conditions, go to your local cooling/respite shelter or to another location with a lower AQI level.

## MAKE YOUR OWN AIR FILTER BOX

While not a permanent, long-term solution, this DIY air filter/purifier can be effective for cleaning inside air. It is easy to make with three relatively inexpensive materials; a box fan, a furnace filter and some packing tape. View the tutorial video at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=YnIvLBe6xUE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YnIvLBe6xUE)



**MUCH MORE ONLINE** There is a lot of information online on preparing for and responding to wildfire smoke that you can search for. Below are some helpful resources to get started with.

- **City of Oakland - Preparing & Responding to Poor and Unhealthy Air Quality**  
[www.oaklandca.gov/resources/preparing-responding-to-poor-and-unhealthy-air-quality](http://www.oaklandca.gov/resources/preparing-responding-to-poor-and-unhealthy-air-quality)
- **AirNow - Steps to Reduce Your Exposure**  
[www.airnow.gov/aqi/aqi-basics/extremely-high-levels-of-pm25/](http://www.airnow.gov/aqi/aqi-basics/extremely-high-levels-of-pm25/)
- **EPA - Wildfires and Indoor Air Quality**  
[www.epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq/wildfires-and-indoor-air-quality-iaq](http://www.epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq/wildfires-and-indoor-air-quality-iaq)
- **California Air Resources Board - Protecting Yourself from Wildfire Smoke**  
[ww2.arb.ca.gov/protecting-yourself-wildfire-smoke](http://ww2.arb.ca.gov/protecting-yourself-wildfire-smoke)
- **CDC - Protect Yourself from Wildfire Smoke**  
[www.cdc.gov/ncetd/features/wildfires/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/ncetd/features/wildfires/index.html)
- **Bay Area Air Quality Management District - Wildfire Safety Tips**  
[www.baaqmd.gov/about-air-quality/wildfire-air-quality-response-program/wildfire-safety](http://www.baaqmd.gov/about-air-quality/wildfire-air-quality-response-program/wildfire-safety)

OCP&R is a program of the Oakland Firesafe Council | [www.oaklandfiresafecouncil.org](http://www.oaklandfiresafecouncil.org)

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