

Wildfire Safety



This Wildfire Preparation packet is designed to give you ideas you can use right now to plan for a potentially active wildfire season. It contains helpful tips, information, resources, and worksheets. We can work together to make our ourselves and our community more resilient to the challenge of wildfires.

Stay aware

- Visit the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Information page at www.dnr.state.mn.us/forestry/fire for current Minnesota wildfire updates, fire danger levels, and burning restrictions
- The US Forest Service – Superior National Forest provides active information on their Facebook page at www.facebook.com/SuperiorNF
- Visit the Cook County Firewise website at www.cookcountyfirewise.org to:
 - Learn more about wildfire safety
 - Register for the CodeRED emergency notification system and download the CodeRED Notification App
- Follow WTIP and Boreal for local news and events.

Plan ahead

- Create an evacuation plan
- Pack a “Go Bag” with emergency supplies and copies of important papers
- Keep the gas tank in vehicles at least half full
- If the evacuation risk is high, back vehicles into your garage or park them in an open space facing the direction of escape.

Assess your home

Assess the area immediately around your home for the presence of easily combustible materials and address any areas of concern

- If you need assistance clearing burnable materials from around your home, Care Partners Chore program may be able to help (please note we cannot use chain saws)

Protect yourself from wildfire smoke

Even if a wildfire isn’t close enough to require evacuation, the smoke from surrounding fires can affect your health. See the attached handout for ideas to protect yourself and your loved ones.

Care for your mental health

Experiencing any natural disaster – including wildfires – can affect us physically, mentally, and emotionally. See the attached handout for tools to support yourself and others before, during and after a fire.

My Evacuation Plan



Call these people if I need help packing up my car or getting out of the area
(you might include friends, neighbors, family, faith community members)

Name _____ Phone _____

Name _____ Phone _____

Name _____ Phone _____

Review my escape routes (you may want to attach a county map with routes highlighted in case cell phone or GPS service is unavailable)

NOTE: Make sure to follow any officially designated evacuation routes

Contact a friend or family member outside the area who can watch my pet if needed

Name _____ Phone _____

Name _____ Phone _____

Name _____ Phone _____

Call a friend or family member outside the area to let them know when I am leaving and what route I expect to take

Name _____ Phone _____

Name _____ Phone _____

Name _____ Phone _____

Prepare my home for evacuation (see next page)

Grab my "Go Bag"

Preparing My Home When Evacuating

- Turn on all interior and exterior lights in house and garage
(to make house visible to firefighters)
- Disconnect garage door
- Shut off all attic fans, whole house fans, swamp coolers, and interior fans
(to help keep smoke and ash from being drawn into the house)
- Turn off any pilot lights
- Shut all interior doors
- Close fireplace damper
- Move furniture to center of room (if there is time)
- Connect all exterior garden hoses and pull out for easy viewing
- Leave any boats in the water with motor, gas, and life preservers
- Leave water jugs filled and available for firefighters
- Put a written note on the table indicating who evacuated, where you are heading, and the time and date
- Notify the County that you have evacuated (call 218-387-3000 or go online www.co.cook.mn.us)
- Leave your home or cabin unlocked

My Go Bag

(larger/heavier items may be kept in vehicle)

- Water (one gallon per person, for drinking and sanitation)
- Food (a several-day supply of non-perishable food)
- Manual can opener
- Pet food and supplies (including medications if needed)
- Family photos or mementos
- Flashlight (rechargeable – best if it includes a worklight and red signal light)
- First aid kit
- Mylar blanket
- N95 mask(s)
- Local and state road maps
- Cell phone and charger (wall plug and solar or battery powered, if possible)
- Satellite GPS Messenger (i.e. SPOT locator)
- Crank AM/FM/Weather radio with internal battery, solar charger, USB port
- Change of clothes
- Extra eyeglasses/contact lenses
- Pillow, blanket, and towel
- Medicine and medical supplies (a few days' worth, if possible)
- Large envelope with copies of important papers:
 - Trust or will
 - Health Care Directive
 - Homeowner's or rental insurance and auto insurance
 - Medicare, Medicaid, and other health insurance policies
 - Personal documents such as ID (make sure they are up to date)
 - List of family contacts with phone numbers
 - List of medications and doctor's phone number
 - Pet vaccination records
- Other _____

My Medical Information

Your name and date of birth: _____

Primary Care Doctor(s)

Name _____ Phone _____ Clinic _____

Name _____ Phone _____ Clinic _____

Specialists (continue on back if needed)

Name _____ Phone _____

Specialty _____ Clinic _____

Name _____ Phone _____

Specialty _____ Clinic _____

Name _____ Phone _____

Specialty _____ Clinic _____

Medications

Medication _____ Dose/Frequency _____

Medication _____ Dose/Frequency _____

Medication _____ Dose/Frequency _____

Medication _____ Dose/Frequency _____

Medication _____ Dose/Frequency _____

Medication _____ Dose/Frequency _____

Medication _____ Dose/Frequency _____

Medication _____ Dose/Frequency _____

Attach copy of most recent insurance card

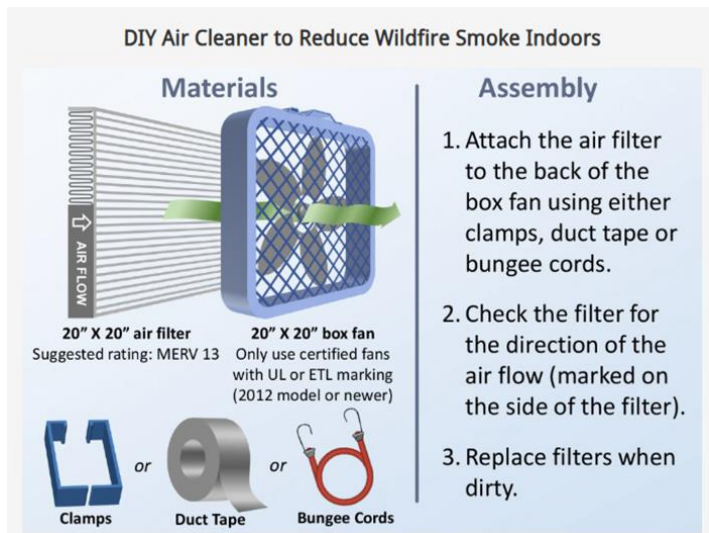


Protect Yourself from Wildfire Smoke

Wildfire smoke is a mix of gases, water vapor and small particles from burning trees, plants, buildings and other material. Breathing in wildfire smoke can hurt your health. Older adults, children, pregnant women and people with asthma, lung disease, or heart disease are especially at risk.

You can take simple steps now to protect yourself and your family from wildfire smoke.

- Keep track of air quality levels
 - To view air quality information using your mobile device, download the Environmental Protection Agency's free AirNow mobile app or visit www.airnow.gov.
- If you are part of a sensitive or at-risk group, check with your doctor or nurse about what you need protect yourself from wildfire smoke.
- Stay indoors and minimize outdoor activity as much as possible when the air quality is poor.
- Use an air purifier at home.



You can make a DIY air filter by attaching a furnace filter to a box fan. Remember to turn off the DIY filter when you leave your home.

Remember to do it yourself at your own risk. Care Partners of Cook County is not liable or responsible for any damage or loss from making an air filter at home or for your use of this information.

(image from airnow.gov)

- Consider setting up a cleaner air space where you live by following these general guidelines:
 - Choose a room to be your cleaner air space.
 - Prevent smoke from entering the room (close the windows).
 - Keep the room cool by using fans or an air conditioner.
 - Filter the air in the room with an air cleaner or DIY air filter.
 - Avoid activities in your home that create smoke or other particles (like burning candles, vacuuming, frying food, etc.).
 - Spend as much time as possible in the cleaner air room.
- If you cannot create a cleaner air space in your home, visit cleaner air shelters and spaces in communities such as churches and libraries.

This page adapted from Oregon State University Extension resource "Our Future in Our Hands" (EM9404)

Assess Your Home

The number and size of wildfires across the United States have increased, affecting many communities. Thankfully, there are basic and affordable actions you can take to protect your home.

Why homes burn

Embers are a major reason why homes are destroyed during a wildfire. Embers are pieces of burning matter from the fire. Wind can carry embers far away from the active fire area. If these embers land on materials that are burnable on or near a house, the home will be at risk of burning. Preparing your home and the area around your home for wildfire and embers can help protect you and your community.

Check that the area surrounding your home is cleared of burnable materials

- Leaves and needles cleared from yard, home foundation, gutters, under decks
- Landscape materials immediately surrounding foundation are non-burnable (i.e. gravel, rock or concrete pavers rather than mulch)
- Tree branches not hanging over roof
- Wood piles stored at a distance from home exterior
- Lawn mowed and plants watered
- Dead or dried plant materials removed from yard and gardens
- Lawn shrubs and trees spaced apart

Help make access to your home easier for firefighters

- Street names and house or apartment numbers are clearly marked.
- Driveway cleared of vegetation, including branches, shrubs and trees.

If your home is in a deeply forested or vulnerable area, consider installing an exterior wildfire sprinkler system

Check with your local fire department or www.cookcountyfirewise.org for more information



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Care For Your Mental Health

Here are a few tips and tools to support your mental well-being if you are affected by wildfire. This is not a complete list. If you or someone you know is experiencing mental health challenges due to wildfire, please contact a behavioral health care provider or other services for support.

BEFORE: Be ready

- Use the information in this packet to plan ahead for a fire. This can help you feel more prepared during an emergency and give you tangible action steps to take.
- Consider adding a few items to support your mental health in your “Go Bag” such as a book, game, small piece of artwork, religious text, or journal
- Ask friends, co-workers and family members about what they are doing to prepare for fires. Share any worries, fears or uncomfortable emotions that you may be experiencing. This can help you process those emotions with people you trust, get more ideas for your preparedness plan and feel connected to others who may be experiencing the same thing.

DURING: Take care

- Check accurate local information sources such as county emergency management or the county sheriff’s office to stay updated on the fire status and evacuations.
- If you are evacuated, try to find a safe place where you can get food, water, rest and medical care if needed for yourself, your family and your pets.
- Practice self-care. It is normal to go into “survival mode” and feel “off” during an emergency. It can also be hard to do what you would typically do to take care of yourself. Even if it may seem difficult to practice self-care during a fire, it is essential. Practice deep breathing and use calming self-talk.
- Keep a journal, try to maintain a schedule, take breaks from the news and social media, get enough sleep and reach out to others.

AFTER: Know the signs

Wildfires affect everyone differently. Signs of emotional distress after a fire could include:

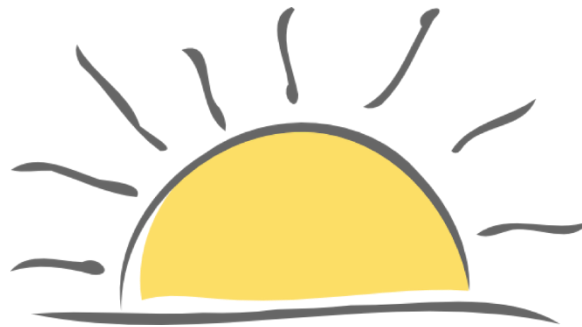
- Eating or sleeping too much or too little
- Nightmares
- Flashbacks
- Angry outbursts
- Being easily startled
- Worrying or feeling guilty
- Restlessness and wariness
- Difficulty remembering things
- Sadness and depression
- Pulling away from people or things
- Having no or low energy, feeling tired
- Feeling afraid
- Unexplained aches and pains, like constant headaches or stomachaches
- Excessive smoking, drinking or abusing drugs or prescription medications
- Thinking of hurting or killing yourself or someone else

AFTER: What to Do

Because everyone experiences different impacts from wildfires, there is also a lot of variety in what tools and strategies work for people and how long it takes to feel better. Consider which of these approaches makes the most sense for you.

- Connect with others about your feelings to help get through a tough time. Talk to family, friends, coworkers, church members, other wildfire survivors and peer support groups.
- Think about other times when you had to cope with something difficult and what helped you then. Use those coping skills now.
- Seek support from professionals who are trained in dealing with what you are experiencing.
- If you are also experiencing other health issues, visit a doctor or clinic. Physical and mental health issues can be related to each other.
- Try self-care exercises like walking or exercising, eating well, meditation, deep breathing exercises, listening to music, or practicing a hobby or creative activity.

Be prepared for emotional distress around the event's anniversary and other triggers. Many people experience renewed feelings of fear, anxiety and sadness around the anniversary of a wildfire. Certain sounds, smells or sights can also take people back to the wildfire or trigger fear of it happening again. Mental health professionals can help you identify healthy coping strategies.



This page adapted from Oregon State University Extension resource “Our Future in Our Hands” (EM9404)

More Resources and Information

Cook County Firewise

website: www.cookcountyfirewise.org

Cook County Firewise Coordinator, Aaron Mollin-Kling: 218-387-4133

Cook County Emergency Management

Emergency Management Director, Mike Keyport: 218-387-3059

Cook County Sheriff's Office

Phone: 218-387-3030

Emergency: **911**

Air Quality Information and Updates

Includes current air quality index by zip code and air quality email alert signup

Website: www.airnow.gov

Disaster Preparedness for Older Adults

www.ready.gov/older-adults

Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA)

Website: www.fema.gov

General Information number for region 5 (IL, IN, MI, MN, OH, WI): 312-408-5500

Minnesota Mental Health Hotline - dial 988

Wildfire Smoke Readiness

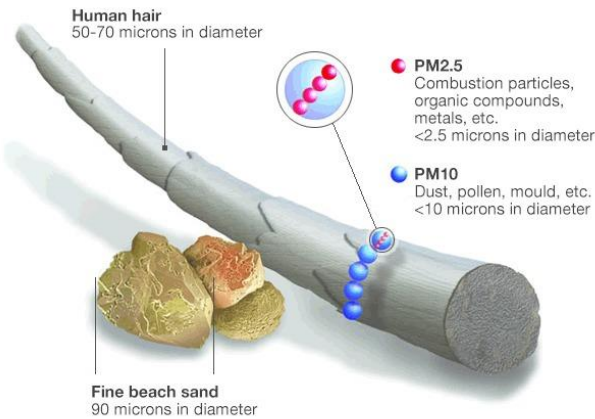
Online resource from Cook County Public Health:

https://co.cook.mn.us/government/departments/public_health_and_human_services/public_health/indoor_air_quality.php



PO Box 282, Grand Marais, MN 55604 | 218.387.3788 | carepartnersofcookcounty.org

Wildfire Smoke Readiness: Air Quality Guide for Particle Pollution



Source: US EPA

Fine particles with diameters 2.5 micrometers or smaller (PM2.5) can be dangerous to your health.

Check current and forecast conditions at www.airnow.gov



<https://www.pca.state.mn.us/air-water-land-climate/current-air-quality-conditions>

The Air Quality Index (AQI) reports the level of air quality and health concern across six categories:

Air Quality Index	What Should I Do?
Good 0-50	It's a great day to be active outside and a good time to make a plan if worse air quality is in the forecast.
Moderate 51-100	Some people are especially sensitive to lower levels of particle pollution and should reduce exposure. For example, limit time outside and avoid strenuous outdoor activity. All sensitive groups should watch for symptoms.
Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups 101-150	Sensitive groups should take steps to reduce exposure. Limit time outside, avoid strenuous outdoor activity, and follow tips for cleaner indoor air. Everyone should watch for symptoms as a sign to reduce exposure.
Unhealthy 151-200	Everyone should reduce exposure. Limit time outside, avoid strenuous outdoor activity, and follow tips for cleaner indoor air.
Very Unhealthy 201-300	Everyone should reduce exposure. Stay inside and filter indoor air to keep it cleaner. Go elsewhere for cleaner air, if needed.
Hazardous >300	Everyone should reduce exposure. Stay inside and filter indoor air to keep it cleaner. Go elsewhere for cleaner air, if needed.

Know the symptoms!

Burning eyes

Coughing

Throat and nose irritation

Headaches

Fatigue

Wheezing and shortness of breath

Irregular heartbeat

Chest pain



If your symptoms become serious, seek medical attention. High exposure to PM2.5 can lead to hospitalizations and increase the risk of death.

Source: Washington Air Quality Guide for Particle Pollution



Sensitive groups with increased risk include:

- Children and older adults.
- Pregnant people.
- People who have asthma or other breathing conditions like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).
- People who have heart disease, high blood pressure, or diabetes.
- People experiencing homelessness.

People with increased exposure include:

- Anyone exercising or playing sports outdoors, including children.
- All ages engaging in longer or more vigorous outdoor activities.
- Outdoor workers, especially in heavy manual labor.
- People without air conditioning who need open windows to cool off.
- Those in homes that can't keep out unhealthy air or lack permanent shelter.

Steps to Reduce Exposure



Limit duration and intensity of outside physical activity.



Stay inside with cleaner indoor air:



Close windows and doors, unless it is too hot to maintain safe temperatures.



Don't add to indoor air pollution, such as cigarette smoking or burning candles.



Filter indoor air through an HVAC system, HEPA portable air cleaner, or DIY box fan filter.



Set air conditioning to recirculate.



If unable to maintain clean air at home, go elsewhere for cleaner air such as a friend's place, public space, or unimpacted area.



If you must be outside, wear a properly fitted, NIOSH-approved particulate respirator, such as an N95 mask.

Source: Washington Air Quality Guide for Particle Pollution

Clean air room: how to set it up.

A clean room can minimize your family's exposure to high levels of pollutants from wildfires. When smoke levels are moderate to unhealthy and are forecasted to remain unhealthy for an extended period of time, spending time in a clean room can help reduce your exposure to smoke while staying indoors. As long as it is safe to stay at home, anyone can benefit from spending time in a clean room during a smoke event. It may be most helpful for people who are at greater risk from the effects of smoke, such as children, older adults, and people with heart disease or breathing problems. If you have heart or lung disease, including asthma, check with your healthcare provider about what to do during smoke events. Follow the steps to set up a clean room efficiently:

Step 1: Choose a room.

A clean room should be big enough to fit everyone who lives in your home.

A bedroom with an attached bathroom, for example, can be a good choice because you can close it off from the rest of the house and keep the door closed for long periods of time.

Step 2: Prevent smoke from entering the room.

Close all windows and doors in the room, but don't do anything that makes it hard to get out, such as taping the door shut.

Step 3: Stay cool.

Run fans, window air conditioners, or central air conditioning. If your air conditioner has a fresh air option—meaning it pulls in air from the outside—turn that function off, close the intake, or set the system to recirculate mode. Avoid using an evaporative cooler or portable air conditioner with a single hose in smoky conditions unless there is a heat emergency.

Step 4: Filter the air in the room.

Use a portable air cleaner and run it continuously if you can. Check the manufacturer's specifications to make sure that the air cleaner is the right size for the room. Pick one that does not produce ozone. If you have central HVAC, set the HVAC system fan to run continuously for additional filtration. This is most effective if you have a high-efficiency filter installed. During smoky periods, plan to replace the filter in your air cleaner or HVAC system more often than recommended by the manufacturer. If you notice that filters appear heavily soiled when you replace them, you should consider changing them more frequently.

Step 5: Avoid creating smoke or other particles indoors, especially in the clean room.

Sources of particles can include gas, propane, or wood-burning stoves; cooking—especially broiling and frying; smoking or vaping; burning candles or incense; and spraying aerosol products, like cleaners or air fresheners. Wiping up dust with a damp cloth can also help keep particles out of the air.

Step 6: Spend as much time as possible in the clean room to benefit from it most.

When the air quality improves, even temporarily, air out the clean room by opening windows or the fresh air intake on your HVAC system to freshen the air.

Always be prepared to evacuate if necessary. Remember—it may be best to seek shelter elsewhere if, for example, you can't stay cool at home, the electricity goes out, or too much smoke is still getting in your home.