

Working in smoky environments

OHS information for employers and workers

Smoke from wildfires is common in Alberta in the spring, summer and autumn months. If you work outdoors in these months, read this bulletin to learn about exposure risks and hazard control.



Key information

Smoke in the air can be a health hazard, even if you are not close to the fire.

Minimize exposure to smoke when working outdoors.

Health Risks

Smoke can be harmful because it carries particulate matter and chemicals that can cause eye irritation, coughing or difficulty breathing, especially for sensitive populations or at-risk workers.

Carbon monoxide exposure is typically only a risk for those workers who are close to fires.

At-risk workers should follow Alberta Health Services [health advisories](#).

Exposure risks

Levels of hazardous substances in the air are likely below occupational exposure limits when locations are far from the fire, even if the air seems smoky.

However, outdoor workers may still be at risk, especially if they:

- Perform strenuous physical work.
- Have existing health risks, including but not limited to respiratory or cardiac health conditions.
- Are elderly.
- Are pregnant.

Hazard assessment and control

As per Part 2 of the Alberta Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Code, employers must identify hazards in the workplace and implement controls, following the hierarchy of controls set out in section 9. For example:



- Eliminate the hazard, by relocating or rescheduling work, until smoke has cleared.
- Engineering controls may include moving work indoors to clean air work areas where ventilation reduces the exposure to smoke.
- Administrative controls are another option. Some examples are:
 - Work in short shifts to limit exposures.
 - Take breaks in clean air, such as a vehicle with closed windows and air set on re-circulate, or an air-conditioned building.
- Use personal protective equipment including respiratory protection equipment (RPE). Workers must be trained on selection, use, maintenance and must be respiratory fit tested when using RPE.

Contact Us

OHS Contact Centre

Anywhere in Alberta

- 1-866-415-8690

Edmonton & area

- 780-415-8690

Deaf or hearing impaired:

- 1-800-232-7215 (Alberta)
- 780-427-9999 (Edmonton)

PSI Online Reporting Service

alberta.ca/report-potentially-serious-incidents.aspx

Website

alberta.ca/occupational-health-safety.aspx

Get copies of the *OHS Act*, Regulation and Code

Alberta Queen's Printer

qp.gov.ab.ca

Occupational Health and Safety

alberta.ca/ohs-act-regulation-code.aspx

For more information

Alberta Health Services (AHS) Air Quality Advisories

albertahealthservices.ca/news/air.aspx

Alberta Government Air Quality Health Index

alberta.ca/about-the-air-quality-health-index.aspx

Wildfire Smoke: OHS information for workers and employers (FI007)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/fi007

Respiratory Protective Equipment: An Employer's Guide (PPE001)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/ppe001

Carbon Monoxide at the Work Site (CH31)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/ch031

Hazard Assessment and Control: a handbook for Alberta employers and workers (BP018)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/bp018

Schedule 1 of Table 2 Occupational Health and Safety Code

qp.alberta.ca/documents/OHS/OHSCode.pdf

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