

Working in smoky environments

OHS information for employers and workers

This bulletin provides health and safety information regarding exposure risks and hazards when working in smoky environments.

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.
- Employers need to perform a hazard assessment and implement controls if work will be conducted in a smoky environment.

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](#).

To view the location and details of active wildfires and fire restrictions on an interactive map, visit the [Alberta Wildfire Status Dashboard](#).

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 Alberta's Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Code, employers must identify hazards at a work site and eliminate the hazard or implement controls, following the hierarchy of controls set out in Section 9 of the OHS Code.

Because working in a smoky environment is a hazard, these OHS requirements apply.

Some examples of ways to eliminate the hazard of working in a smoky environment or implement controls are as follows:

- **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. For example:
 - Work in short shifts to limit exposures.
 - Take breaks in locations that have clean air, such as a vehicle with closed windows and its air conditioning control set on re-circulate, or an air-conditioned building.
- Use **personal protective equipment**, including respiratory protection equipment (RPE). Workers must be trained on the selection, use, maintenance of RPE, and must be fit tested when using RPE.

Contact us

OHS Contact Centre

Anywhere in Alberta

- 1-866-415-8690

Edmonton and surrounding area

- 780-415-8690

Deaf or hard of hearing (TTY)

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

Notify OHS of health and safety concerns

alberta.ca/file-complaint-online.aspx

Call the OHS Contact Centre if you have concerns that involve immediate danger to a person on a work site.

Report a workplace incident to OHS

alberta.ca/ohs-complaints-incident.aspx

Website

alberta.ca/ohs

Get copies of the OHS Act, Regulation and Code

Alberta King's Printer

alberta.ca/alberta-kings-printer.aspx

OHS

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

Alberta Wildfire Status Dashboard

arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/3ffcc2d0ef3e4e0999b0cf8b636defa3

Carbon Monoxide at the Work Site (CH031)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/ch031

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

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/bp018

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

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/ppe001

Occupational Health and Safety Code

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

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

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/fi007

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