

Warning issued for unhealthy air conditions

Contributed by Lake County News reports
Wednesday, 09 July 2008

LAKE COUNTY – Fires in Mendocino and Butte counties were responsible for increasing amounts of smoke in Lake County's air on Tuesday, which has resulted in an alert from air quality and health officials.

Lake County's Air Quality Management District issued an alert warning of unhealthy conditions for sensitive individuals that are expected on Wednesday.

A report from Air Pollution Control Officer Bob Reynolds said anticipated conditions on Wednesday include wind and levels of particulate and ozone presently in the air.

Individuals who are especially susceptible to smoky conditions are children, the elderly, individuals with heart conditions or chronic lung disease such as asthma, bronchitis and other respiratory conditions, Reynolds reported. The heat can make the stress worse, especially if exercising hard.

Even though local hospitals report no unusual increases in illness likely to be related to poor air quality, Lake County health officials recommend taking simple precautions in order to stay healthy.

Lake County Public Health Officer Dr. Karen Tait advises residents near the fires to be prepared. Individuals with asthma, bronchitis, emphysema and other lung or heart diseases should make sure that they have at least a five-day supply of any prescribed medications. Individuals with asthma should carefully follow their asthma management plans.

Anyone, regardless of known health conditions, should seek medical attention if they experience unusual symptoms of chest pain, chest tightness or shortness of breath.

Sensitive individuals should be prepared to stay indoors, avoid vigorous physical activity and check for a "recirculation" function on the air conditioner. If smoke is present, it will be easier to breathe indoors if air is recirculating instead of drawing smoky air from outdoors. Strong consideration should be given to moving planned outdoor events to an indoor location or rescheduling them, especially if they involve sports or similar activities.

Tait noted that many of the same people who have been advised to take precautions related to recent reductions in air quality from wildfire activity also are susceptible to heat-related illness and should take special care. It is important to stay hydrated; drink adequate water to ensure you do.

Dust masks are not protective against the most harmful pollutants caused by wildfire smoke that drifts to nearby areas. They are useful in filtering out the ash and larger particles that are encountered in burn areas and should be considered when recovering property or cleaning areas that have burned.

Air purifying respirators, such as N-95 filtering face pieces, may be effective in reducing harmful particulate matter, but also increase the work of breathing, can lead to physiologic stress, and are not recommended as a general protective measure. Their use should be limited to individual circumstances requiring additional protection (<http://bepreparedcalifornia.ca.gov/EPO/BeInformed/NaturalDisasters/Wildfires/CleanupFireAsh.htm>), preferably in personnel trained and familiar with the proper fitting and use of these devices.

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