

## National Forest fires continue to cause air quality issues

Contributed by Lake County News reports  
Friday, 25 July 2008

LAKE COUNTY &ndash; Smoke from wildfires on public lands continues to wreak havoc with Lake County's air quality, which could move into the unhealthy range on Friday.

In recent days, smoke pouring into Lake County's air basin has led some county residents to conclude that there must be new fires nearby.

But county Deputy Air Pollution Control Officer Doug Gearhart reported that the smoke is coming from the Soda Complex on the Mendocino National Forest and the Lime Complex, with west to northeast winds bringing the smoke here.

The Soda Complex of four fires has burned nearly 8,652 acres and is 95-percent contained, according to the US Forest Service. The Lime complex, composed of 92 fires that includes those on the Yolla Bolly-Middle Eel Wilderness, is spread across several wilderness areas and National Forests in Northern California, with 116,488 acres burned.

Using the Federal Air Quality Index for particulate matter, Gearhart said Lake County's air quality is expected to be in the moderate range for a 24-hour average.

Although the 24 hour average may be moderate trending to unhealthy, mid-day to early evening conditions have been in the unhealthy for sensitive groups to unhealthy range, with similar conditions expected Friday, Gearhart said.

On July 10, air quality also was in the unhealthy for sensitive groups range, according to statistics Gearhart provided.

Smoky conditions can cause issues for everyone, but can be particularly hazardous for young children, the elderly, individuals with heart conditions or chronic lung disease such as asthma, bronchitis and other respiratory conditions.

Lake County Public Health Officer Dr. Karen Tait advises area residents to be cautious.

&ldquo;Variable weather conditions and ongoing fire activity may result in localized areas of reduced air quality, which could pose health risks to people with underlying health conditions,&rdquo; she said. &ldquo;Since we can't always predict when and where &lsquo;pockets&rsquo; of poorer air quality may occur, it is prudent to be careful until conditions stabilize.&rdquo;

Individuals with asthma, bronchitis, emphysema and other lung or heart diseases should carefully adhere to their medical treatment plans and maintain at least a five-day supply of supply of prescribed medications. They should limit outdoor activity and unnecessary physical exertion. Drinking plenty of water to avoid drying of the airways is generally recommended, unless restricted for medical reasons.

Dust masks are not protective against the most harmful pollutants caused by wildfire smoke that drifts to nearby areas, health officials reported. Masks are useful in filtering out the larger particles and ash 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 for the general public in Lake County. Their use should be limited to individual circumstances requiring additional protection in personnel trained and familiar with the proper fitting and use of these devices.

Mechanical air filtering units with HEPA filters, can be useful, according to health officials. It is important that the size and the air flow of the unit be matched to the indoor space it is intended to treat. There are a variety of other devices marketed to purify air that should be avoided, as they might be ineffective under wildfire circumstances and some can actually worsen the air quality by producing ozone.

{mos\_sb\_discuss:2}