

# Safety Newsletter



Central Region  
School Insurance Group

## A quarterly publication for injury and illness prevention

**Summer 2020**

### **WILDFIRES AND INDOOR AIR QUALITY (IAQ)**

During a wildfire, smoke can make the outdoor air unhealthy to breathe. Local officials may advise you to stay indoors during a smoke event. You should be aware that some of the smoke from outdoors can enter your home and make it unhealthy to breathe indoor air, too.

If you are close to a wildfire, the fire itself, as well as heavy smoke and ash, can pose serious, immediate risks to your safety and health. You and your family should be prepared to evacuate immediately if told to do so. Farther from a wildfire, you may be exposed to smoke even if the fire itself is far away.

Smoke is made up of a complex mixture of gases and fine particles produced when wood and other organic materials burn. The biggest health threat from smoke is from fine particles. These microscopic particles can get into your eyes and respiratory system – whether you are outdoors or indoors, where they can cause health problems such as burning eyes, runny nose, and illnesses such as bronchitis. Fine particles also can aggravate chronic heart and lung diseases - and even are linked to premature deaths in people with these conditions.

If you are healthy, you're usually not at a major risk from short-term exposures to smoke. Still, it's a good idea to avoid breathing smoke – both outdoors and indoors – if you can help it.

### **Know how to adjust your HVAC system or air conditioner to keep smoke out**

It's also a good idea to get familiar with your HVAC system or air conditioner system, if you have one, so you can adjust it to keep smoke out.

- If you have a central HVAC system, find out if it has a fresh air intake. If it does, find out how to close it or turn the system to recirculate mode. Make sure the HVAC filter is in good condition, fits snugly in the filter slot, and is replaced as recommended by the manufacturer. Consider upgrading to a MERV 13 or higher rated filter if your system can accommodate it.
- If you have a window air conditioner, find out how to close the outdoor air damper. If you cannot close the damper, consider preparing other cooling options like a fan. Make sure that the seal between the air conditioner and the window is as tight as possible.
- If you have a portable air conditioner with a single hose, typically vented out of a window, do not use

it in smoky conditions. Consider other cooling options like a fan or window air conditioner. If you have a portable air conditioner with two hoses, make sure that the seal between the window vent kit and the window is as tight as possible.

### **YOUR SAFETY IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY**

People go to work every day, but don't expect to be injured. You have a right to a safe and healthful work environment. But employers are not the only ones responsible for your safety. You are, too. We all share the responsibility for encouraging a safety culture to improve behavior and performance in the workplace.

#### **Here's how you can do it.**

*Get involved.* If you think a job or a task is unsafe, stop the work. If you see something unsafe, report it. Make a commitment today to take an active role in safety. Don't wait until something happens and an injury takes over your life.

- Follow established safety policies and procedures.
- Maintain your personal work area in a clean and orderly manner.
- Wear, maintain and properly store your personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Attend all safety training.
- Eliminate slips, trips and falls.
- Lifting safely and help others to do the same.
- Label all chemical containers and becoming familiar with Safety Data Sheets.
- Know evacuation procedures and the location of emergency equipment.

#### *Speak up.*

- Talk to your supervisor if you have safety concerns. No one knows your job and tools better than you do.
- Never operate equipment or machinery unless you've been properly trained.
- Immediately notify your co-workers and supervisor of any damaged equipment, hazardous conditions, or unsafe behavior.
- Promptly report all injuries, illnesses and near misses to your supervisor.
- Help identify job hazards and take the appropriate precautions to protect yourself and others.

### **TOP WORKPLACE SAFETY TIPS**

- 1. Keep Correct Posture to Protect Your Back.** If you work at a desk, keep your shoulders in line with your hips to avoid back problems. If you're picking things up, use correct lifting techniques so your back doesn't get hurt. Avoid stooping and twisting.
- 2. Use Tools and Machines Properly.** Taking shortcuts is a leading cause of workplace injury.



**3. Take Regular Breaks.** So many work-related injuries occur because a worker is tired, burned out, or not alert to their surroundings. Take regular breaks to help you stay fresh on the job.

**4. Report Unsafe Conditions to Your Supervisor.** Your supervisor needs to be informed about any workplace safety hazards or risks.

**5. Use Mechanical Aids Whenever Possible.** Instead of attempting to carry or lift something that's really heavy in an attempt to save a sliver of time, take an extra minute to use a cart, dolly, or forklift.

**6. Reduce Workplace Stress.** Stress can lead to depression and concentration problems.

**7. Wear the Correct Safety Equipment.** Depending on the job, equipment like earplugs, earmuffs, hard hats, safety goggles, or gloves greatly reduce the risk of workplace injury.

### IT IS HOT!

The infographic is a vertical split diagram. The left side is yellow and labeled 'HEAT EXHAUSTION'. The right side is red and labeled 'HEAT STROKE'. A central figure of a person is also split vertically. Symptoms for Heat Exhaustion include: faint or dizzy, excessive sweating, cool, pale, clammy skin, nausea or vomiting, rapid, weak pulse, and muscle cramps. Symptoms for Heat Stroke include: throbbing headache, no sweating, body temperature above 103° and red, hot, dry skin, nausea or vomiting, rapid, strong pulse, and may lose consciousness. At the bottom, treatment for Heat Exhaustion is: 'Get to a cooler, air conditioned place', 'Drink water if fully conscious', and 'Take a cool shower or use cold compresses'. Treatment for Heat Stroke is: 'CALL 9-1-1' and 'Take immediate action to cool the person until help arrives'.

The hot days of summer are here and will continue for a while. Throughout California, thousands of employees who work outdoors face the potential dangers associated with overexposure to heat. Factors such as working in direct sunlight, high temperature and humidity, physical exertion and lack of sufficient water intake can lead to heat stress. During the warm season, it is important to understand that exposure to heat can cause serious illness or death. Exposure to heat can cause heat cramps and rashes. The most serious heat-related disorders are heat stroke and heat exhaustion. Symptoms include confusion; irrational behavior; loss of consciousness; hot, dry skin; and abnormally high body temperature. Drinking cool water, reducing physical exertion, wearing appropriate clothing and regular rest periods in a cool recovery area can lessen the effects of working in summer heat.

### PROTECT YOURSELF FROM THE SUN

Sunlight contains ultraviolet (UV) radiation, which causes premature aging of the skin, wrinkles, cataracts, and skin cancer. The amount of damage from UV exposure depends on the strength of the light, the length of exposure, and whether the skin is protected.

*There are no safe UV rays or safe suntans.*

**Skin Cancer.** Sun exposure at any age can cause skin cancer. Be especially careful in the sun if you burn easily, spend a lot of time outdoors, or have any of the following physical features:

- Numerous, irregular, or large moles.
- Freckles.
- Fair skin.
- Blond, red, or light brown hair.

**Self-Examination.** It's important to examine your body monthly because skin cancers detected early can almost always be cured. The most important warning sign is a spot on the skin that is changing in size, shape, or color during a period of 1 month to 1 or 2 years. Skin cancers often take the following forms:

- Pale, wax-like, pearly nodules.
- Red, scaly, sharply outlined patches.
- Sores that don't heal.
- Small, mole-like growths—melanoma,
- the most serious type of skin cancer.

If you find such unusual skin changes, see a health care professional immediately.



### Block Out UV Rays.

**Cover up.** Wear tightly-woven clothing that blocks out light. Try this test: Place your hand between a single layer of the clothing and a light source. If you can see your hand through the fabric, the garment offers little protection.

**Use sunscreen.** A sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15 blocks 93 percent of UV rays. Block both UVA & UVB rays to guard against skin cancer.

**Wear a hat.** A hat protects the neck, ears, eyes, forehead, nose, and scalp.

**Wear UV-absorbent shades.** Sunglasses should block 99 to 100 percent of UVA and UVB radiation.

**Limit exposure.** If you're unsure about the sun's intensity, take the shadow test: If your shadow is shorter than you, the sun's rays are the day's strongest. For more information about preventing, detecting, and treating skin cancer, check out these sources:

[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org) 1-800-ACS-2345

[www.skincancer.org](http://www.skincancer.org) 1-800-SKIN-490

### DON'T BRING FIDO TO WORK!

I know with COVID-19, you may be tempted to bring your pet to work to keep you company as you do remote teaching. As tempting as it may be, pets are not allowed in the workplace. School District Policy does not allow employees to bring their pets to work. Of course, Service Animals, are allowed – but they are on-the-job!