



Oregon

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NF-21-037 – Provider Alert

Date: July 16, 2021

To: All Nursing Facilities

From: Aging and People with Disabilities
ODHS Safety, Oversight and Quality Unit (SOQ)

Subject: **Wildfire Preparedness**



Oregon's wildfire season has already started and as temperatures rise and dry conditions persist through the summer, wildfires may contribute to worsening air quality and the potential need for evacuations. This alert is to serve as a guide for wildfire preparedness, outlining tips and resources available to you. Being prepared and having an emergency and evacuation plan are not only required for nursing facilities, they are also critical for ensuring the safety of both providers and residents.

Stay informed: Being aware of air quality, fire location, and what you need in the event of evacuation can save lives. Here are some good ways to stay up to date on Oregon wildfires:

- Enroll in your county's [Public Alerts](#) or [Citizen Alert](#) to receive updates about weather emergencies via text.
- [Oregon Smoke Blog](#): Provides additional information on current wildfires in Oregon, including links to various agency websites. During periods of high wildfire activity, this blog can be a source of information on wildfire status, air quality conditions, smoke forecasts, school and activity closures, burn bans, location of clean air shelters, and travel restrictions due to visibility.
- [Northwest Interagency Coordination Center's fire map](#): Information on fires across the Northwest. Click on fire icons for detailed information about each fire.
- [Oregon Health Authority: Wildfire Smoke and Your Health – Frequently Asked Questions](#).
- [Air Quality Index Map](#): This page shows the location of air quality monitoring stations throughout Oregon.

Be prepared: Having an evacuation plan can help keep you focused, calm, and ready to deal with wildfire conditions. Here are some tips to ensure safe evacuation:

- Have an emergency food and water supply. Review the nursing facility rules pertaining to emergency food and water supplies by clicking [here](#).
- Have an emergency medicine supply and plan for storage. Make a plan to keep medications that need refrigeration cold.
- Bring emergency power sources for medical devices, flashlights, and extra batteries. If you have a generator, ensure there is fuel available and staff know how to access it. Review the CDC guide for emergency power sources by clicking [here](#).
- Collect and protect important documents, including resident records as well as your own personal information. Review the CDC guide for paperwork by clicking [here](#).
- Check [Tripcheck](#) before making travel or evacuation plans. This site is run by the Oregon Department of Transportation and will be updated frequently.
- Review your emergency evacuation plan and ensure your evacuation site(s) are still available and well outside the range of the evacuation zone. Ensure you have back-up evacuation site(s) in the event multiple providers are using the same site. **Be prepared to share your evacuation plan and site(s) with the Department if asked.**
- Review the disaster preparedness interpretive guidelines outlined in Appendix Z of [the CMS State Operations Manual by clicking here](#).

Know who is at risk: Older adults and people with chronic illness or lung disease are more likely to be affected by smoke. Smoke from wildfires is a mixture of gases and fine particles from burning trees and other plant materials. Smoke can hurt your eyes, irritate your respiratory system, and worsen chronic heart and lung diseases. Here are some tips to dealing with smoke exposure:

- Pay attention to local air quality reports. Listen and watch for news or health warnings about smoke. Find out if your community provides reports about the Environmental Protection Agency's Air Quality Index (AQI). Also pay attention to public health messages about taking additional safety measures.

- If you are advised to stay indoors, keep indoor air as clean as possible. Keep windows and doors closed unless it is extremely hot outside. Run an air conditioner if you have one but keep the fresh air intake closed and the filter clean to prevent outdoor smoke from getting inside. Running a high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter or an electro-static precipitator (ESP) can also help you keep your indoor air clean. If you do not have an air conditioner and it is too warm to stay inside with the windows closed, seek shelter elsewhere.
- Do not add to indoor pollution. When smoke levels are high, do not use anything that burns, such as candles, fireplaces, or gas stoves. Do not vacuum, because vacuuming stirs up particles already inside your home.
- Do not rely on masks for protection. Paper "comfort" or "dust" masks commonly found at hardware stores are designed to trap large particles, such as sawdust. These masks will not protect your lungs from smoke. There are also specially designed air filters worn on the face called respirators. These must be fitted, tested and properly worn to protect against wildfire smoke. People who do not properly wear their respirator may gain a false sense of security. If you choose to wear a respirator, select an "N95" respirator, and make sure you find someone who has been trained to help you select the right size, test the seal and teach you how to use it. It may offer some protection if used correctly. For more information about effective masks, see the Respirator Fact Sheet provided by CDC's by clicking [here](#).

Additional tips for those with chronic illness:

- Have an adequate supply of medications.
- If you have a resident with asthma, make sure there are inhalers accessible for resident use.
- If you have a resident with heart disease, check with their health care providers about precautions to take during smoke events.
- If you plan to use a portable air cleaner, select a high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter or an electro-static precipitator (ESP) buy one that matches the room size specified by the manufacturer.
- Call the resident's health care provider if they have a condition that may worsen after smoke exposure.

You may contact the Nursing Facility Licensing Unit with any concerns, or

questions about resources available to you. Please email NFLicensing@dhsoha.state.or.us with any additional questions.

If you have questions, please contact your licensing team:

Residential Care and Assisted Living Facilities:

CBC.team@dhsoha.state.or.us

Nursing Facilities: NFLicensing@dhsoha.state.or.us

Oregon Department of Human Services website: www.oregon.gov/DHS/