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Public Health Alert – Smoke Inhalation Advisory

Smoke from wildfires unhealthy, poor air quality

FRANKFORT, Ky. (Nov. 9, 2016) – The Kentucky Department for Public Health (DPH), within the Cabinet for Health and Family Services, is issuing a Public Health Alert - Smoke Inhalation Advisory due to wildfires causing poor air quality in southeastern Kentucky.

Air quality tests conducted in some areas of Bell, Harlan and Rockcastle counties by the Kentucky Department for Environmental Protection (KDEP) have shown values that are unhealthy for sensitive groups such as people with respiratory disorders including asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema, etc. Harlan and Knott counties have air quality test values that are deemed unhealthy, meaning that the general public in these counties may begin to experience adverse health effects. Breathitt and Perry counties have readings that place their residents in the very unhealthy level of health concern, meaning that the general public is at risk for experiencing serious health effects. Some areas of Breathitt, Laurel and Whitley counties have air quality levels that are hazardous, meaning the entire population is expected to be affected by health hazards.

These levels were observed Tuesday morning and will change as winds and fires change. Shelter-in-place is advised for people with health risks. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommends that areas with a hazardous level of health cancel outdoor events and consider closing schools and workplaces.

There are currently six counties (Breathitt, Harlan, Bell, Letcher, Perry, and Pike) where the Kentucky National Guard is actively conducting aerial operations to combat woodland fires. Other counties in the area are being monitored by the KDEP at the time of this press release.

Wildfire smoke can harm persons in multiple ways. Smoke can hurt the eyes, irritate the respiratory system, and worsen chronic heart and lung diseases. Please review the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Wildfire Smoke fact sheet at <http://www.cdc.gov/disasters/wildfires/smoke.html> noting the following tips that can help limit a person's exposure to smoke:

- Pay attention to local air quality reports. When a wildfire occurs in your area, watch for news or health warnings about smoke. Pay attention to public health messages and take extra safety measures such as avoiding spending time outdoors.
- If you are told to stay indoors, stay indoors and keep your indoor air as clean as possible. Keep windows and doors closed. 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. Seek shelter elsewhere if you do not have an air conditioner and it is too warm to stay inside with the windows closed.

- Do not add to indoor pollution. When smoke levels are high, do not use anything that burns, such as candles and fireplaces. Do not vacuum, because vacuuming stirs up particles already inside your home. Do not smoke tobacco or other products, because smoking puts even more pollution into the air.
- Follow your doctor's advice about medicines and about your respiratory management plan if you have asthma or another lung disease. Call your doctor if your symptoms worsen.
- Do not rely on dust masks for protection. Paper "comfort" or "dust" masks commonly found at hardware stores trap large particles, such as sawdust. These masks will not protect your lungs from smoke. An "N95" mask, properly worn, will offer some protection. If you decide to keep a mask on hand, see the [Respirator Fact Sheet](#) provided by CDC's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.
- Avoid smoke exposure during outdoor recreation. Wildfires and prescribed burns—fires that are set on purpose to manage land—can create smoky conditions. Before you travel to a park or forest, check to see if any wildfires are happening or if any prescribed burns are planned.

Over the upcoming days, DPH will continue to work with local and state officials to monitor the drought and wildfire situation. As a result, we are asking you to keep DPH informed of any public health concerns in your area, especially if high risk groups and healthcare facilities are impacted and/or additional resources or assistance is needed.

Public health-related impacts and requests for assistance should be sent to the State Health Operations Center (SHOC) via email at CHFSDPHDOC@ky.gov. If assistance is needed after normal business hours, please contact DPH's On-Call Epidemiologist at 1-888-9REPORT ([973-7678](tel:973-7678)).

Be sure to follow CHFS Twitter @chfsky, KYHealthAlerts and KYEM's social media - #kywildfires.

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The Cabinet for Health and Family Services is home to most of the state's human services and healthcare programs, including the Department for Medicaid Services, the Department for Community Based Services, the Department for Public Health, and the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities. CHFS is one of the largest agencies in state government, with nearly 8,000 full- and part-time employees located across the Commonwealth focused on improving the lives and health of Kentuckians.