



IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF  
**HEALTH & WELFARE**

C.L. 'Butch' Otter – Governor  
RICHARD M. ARMSTRONG –  
Director

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR  
450 West State Street, 10<sup>th</sup> Floor

P.O. Box 83720  
Boise, ID 83720-0036  
PHONE 208-334-5500  
FAX 208-334-5926

**NEWS RELEASE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
August 30, 2010

Tom Shanahan  
(208) 334-0668

**State Agencies Offer Tips on Reducing Exposure to Wildfire Smoke**

There are a number of wildfires burning throughout the state and smoke from these fires can cause serious health problems. The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare (IDHW) and the Department of Environmental Quality (IDEQ) encourage Idaho residents to take precautions and avoid unnecessary exposure to wildfire smoke.

“The effects of smoke range from eye and respiratory tract irritation to more serious disorders, including reduced lung function, bronchitis, exacerbation of asthma, and premature death,” says Dr. Kai Elgethun, Toxicologist for IDHW. In areas with wildfire smoke, older adults, people with respiratory or heart disease and parents of infants should be careful to limit outdoor activity until air quality improves

People exposed to smoke may experience symptoms such as coughing and shortness of breath. Older adults, infants, children and people with medical conditions such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and congestive heart disease are more affected. Those who use inhalers for asthma or other conditions should keep them close at hand. People are advised to seek medical treatment for uncontrolled coughing, wheezing, choking, or if breathing difficulty continues once they are indoors. IDHW provides these tips for people to reduce their exposure to smoke and protect their health:

- Limit outdoor activity, especially for older adults, small children, and those with respiratory or heart disease;
- If the weather is warm, run your air conditioner to re-circulate air. Turn the fan blower on manually so it continuously filters the air in your home;
- Wash or change filters on air conditioners and/or furnaces frequently. Use high efficiency filters when possible;
- For homes without a central heating and/or cooling system, use portable air purifiers to remove particles (air purifiers that utilize HEPA filters are best, avoid using air purifiers that produce ozone);
- Do not run or engage in heavy work or exercise when the air quality index reaches ‘unhealthy’ levels;

(more)

- Stay well-hydrated by drinking plenty of water. Remaining hydrated helps dilute phlegm in the respiratory tract making it easier to cough smoke particles out. Plan on coughing, it is nature's way of clearing your lungs. Avoid caffeine products, sugary drinks and alcohol as they have a dehydrating effect; and
- If you wear contact lenses - switch to eyeglasses in a smoky environment.

To find daily updates on air quality information in your area, go to IDEQ's website at

[http://www.deq.idaho.gov/air/data\\_reports.cfm](http://www.deq.idaho.gov/air/data_reports.cfm).

For more helpful tips provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), please visit

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/wildfires/facts.asp>

**(Editors: For more information on health issues associated with air quality, contact Dr. Kai Elgethun, toxicologist for IDHW, at 334-5682.)**