



COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE
COMMUNITY HEALTH AGENCY
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Date: July 14, 2006

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

RIVERSIDE COUNTY HEALTH OFFICER OFFERS ADVICE TO PUBLIC ON HOW TO PROTECT HEALTH DURING WILDFIRES

Air quality throughout portions of Riverside County affected by the ongoing fires continues to be unhealthy. Dr. Gary M. Feldman, Riverside County Health Officer, encourages residents to take precautionary measures to protect themselves from exposure to the smoke and ash produced by these fires, especially the elderly, the young and those with respiratory concerns such as heart condition or chronic lung disease.

Additionally, Dr. Feldman discourages the use of masks to protect against unhealthy air. Wearing a mask is not an effective exposure-reduction strategy during a wildfire. For a mask to be effective, it must be able to filter very small particles (approximately 0.3 to 0.1 micrometer) and must fit well to provide an airtight seal around the wearer's mouth and nose. Commonly available paper dust masks, which are designed to filter out larger particles such as sawdust, offer little protection. The same is true for bandanas, wet or dry, and tissues held over the mouth or nose.

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Surgical masks that trap small particles are designed to filter air coming out of the wearer's mouth and do not provide a good seal to prevent inhalation of small particles or combustion gases. In fact, masks may actually be detrimental by giving the wearer a false sense of security that encourages increased physical activity and time spent outdoors.

AIR QUALITY

Residents in smoky areas should stay indoors and limit their physical activity outdoors. In smoky conditions, strenuous outdoor activities, including aerobic sports and children's physical education classes, should be curtailed. Check for a "recirculation" function on your air conditioner. If smoke is present, it will be easier to breathe indoors if air is re-circulating instead of drawing smoky air from outdoors.

Regarding the smoky conditions, Dr. Feldman emphasizes that infants and young children, the elderly, pregnant women, individuals with heart conditions or chronic lung disease such as asthma and bronchitis, and individuals with other respiratory ailments are especially vulnerable. Contact your medical provider if you have symptoms such as chest pain, chest tightness, shortness of breath, or severe fatigue. This is important for not only people with chronic lung or heart disease, but also for individuals who have not been previously diagnosed with such illnesses. Smoke can "unmask" or produce symptoms of such diseases.

Because of the uncertainty of fire conditions, Dr. Feldman advises residents near the fires to be prepared. Individuals with asthma, bronchitis, emphysema and other lung or heart diseases should make sure that they have their medication and have at least a five-day supply.

Individuals with asthma should consult their physician about an asthma management plan and stick to it during the unusually smoky conditions. You should also limit household pet's outdoor activities and ensure clean drinking water is available for them at all times.

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FOOD SAFETY

Power outages are also possible during wildfires. A power outage of two hours or less is not considered hazardous to food that is stored in a properly functioning refrigerator or freezer. Should a power outage occur, residents should take the following recommendations to keep food safe:

For consumers, food processors and retailers:

Cold Foods

- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible.
- Group packages of cold food together to reduce heat gain.
- The use of dry ice may result in skin burns or unsafe build-up of carbon dioxide. Proper safety and handling precautions should be taken if dry ice is going to be used.

Hot Foods

- Do not place hot foods in refrigerators or freezers. Use ice to rapidly cool small batches of hot food before placing in a refrigerator or freezer.

When power is restored, identify foods that require refrigeration and may not have been stored in a temperature cold enough to prevent the growth of harmful bacteria.

If temperatures are at 45 degrees or below, the food can be considered safe. Product temperatures should be checked with an accurate thermometer.

If consumers are in doubt about the safety of perishable food that has not been maintained below 45 degrees, they should discard it. For consumers or retailers that have more specific questions about the safety of their food, they can contact Riverside County Environmental Health Department at (951) 358-5172

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