

Wildfire Smoke Travels Farther Than You Think

(NAPSA)—There's been a disturbing pattern of increasing wildfires in the U.S. and Canada. Nine of the 10 largest wildfires in the U.S. in recent history have occurred since 2000. The U.S. Forest Service now spends more than half its annual budget on firefighting, compared to 16 percent just 20 years ago. In Canada, hundreds of wildfires burned throughout the nation in 2015 as a result of scorching temperatures and drought.

The trend is likely to continue, and wildfires are likely to be a health concern for areas far downwind. More than ever, it's important to know what steps to take when wildfires affect the air quality where you live.

Wildfire Smoke Travels Farther Than Previously Thought

In one recent study, researchers discovered that rural wildfire smoke drifts farther from its source than was previously thought. Examining satellite data to track the movement and dispersal of smoke plumes, they found that wildfire smoke drifts at a very high altitude, eventually reaching distant urban centers and interacting with other pollutants to create elevated ozone levels far from the fire source.

Previous studies had found that wildfires release nitrogen oxide and hydrocarbons that contribute to elevated ozone levels, but those effects were seen mostly in rural areas, not distant urban centers far removed from the fires. Breathing ozone can trigger a variety of negative health effects, including coughing, throat irritation and congestion in healthy people. Furthermore, ozone can worsen symptoms of bronchitis, emphysema and asthma.

Wildfires And Heart Attacks

Another recent study, published in the *Journal of the American Heart Association*, reported new evidence of a connection between wildfire smoke particles and acute heart disease, including cardiac arrest. Smoke particles that are 2.5 microns or less in diameter (known as "fine" particles) in particular were found to be associated with a short-term increased risk of cardiac arrest. The study also found an increase in emergency-department hospital visits associated with exposure to fine smoke particles from wild-



A wildfire hundreds of miles away can be a threat to your health—but there are steps you can take to protect yourself.

fires and a 6.9 percent increase in cardiac arrests as a result of exposure to wildfire smoke particles. The increase was most strongly associated with men and people more than 65 years old. Increases were also found in other forms of heart disease.

How To Protect Yourself From Wildfire Smoke

Fortunately, there are precautions you can take if wildfires occur near you. Here are a few:

1. Protect your indoor air.

Keep windows and doors closed. If you use an air conditioner, keep the fresh-air intake closed. A high-performance air purifier such as the IQAir HealthPro Plus will help remove smoke particles of all sizes from indoor air. It will also help control ozone levels. This is critical if you live in an urban area downwind (even remotely) from wildfires.

2. Remain indoors as much as possible. This is especially true for those with respiratory or heart disease, the elderly and children.

3. Wear a mask outdoors. A paper dust mask or surgical mask is not sufficient. Choose a respirator mask with an N95 or N100 rating.

4. Avoid activities that further pollute the indoor air. Avoid burning candles, using the fireplace, or even vacuuming (unless you own a high-performance HEPA vacuum cleaner). All of these can otherwise become additional sources of indoor air pollutants.

Wildfires can occur with little or no notice, and they can poison the air for hundreds of miles or more. Be ready to react quickly and take the right steps to protect your home and family from unhealthy air quality when wildfires occur.