

Wildfire Smoke Advisory for Commercial Buildings

Protecting Employees from Poor Air Quality (PM2.5)

Central Massachusetts – Canadian Wildfire Smoke

Wildfire smoke from Canada is affecting air quality across New England. The primary health concern is fine particulate matter (PM2.5)—particles that are 2.5 microns or smaller. These particles can penetrate deep into the lungs and may aggravate asthma, COPD, heart disease, and other respiratory conditions.

Important: PM2.5 generated by wildfire smoke can enter commercial buildings through outside air ventilation systems if building HVAC systems are not properly managed.

OSHA Guidance

OSHA does not have a specific standard for wildfire smoke exposure in indoor workplaces. However, employers are required under the General Duty Clause of the Occupational Safety and Health Act to provide a workplace free from recognized hazards likely to cause serious harm. OSHA also recommends controlling indoor air quality by maintaining ventilation systems and reducing the introduction of outdoor contaminants during smoke events.

Recommended Actions for Building Owners and Facility Managers

1. Monitor Air Quality

Monitor local Air Quality Index (AQI) using [AirNow.gov](https://airnow.gov).
Pay particular attention to PM2.5 levels.

2. Optimize HVAC Operations

Keep HVAC systems operating continuously during occupied hours.
Verify outdoor air dampers are functioning properly.
When outdoor air quality is poor, reduce outdoor air intake only if it can be done without compromising building ventilation or applicable codes.

Avoid opening windows and doors unnecessarily.

3. Improve Filtration

Install the highest efficiency filters your HVAC system can safely accommodate (preferably MERV-13 or higher when compatible with the system).

Inspect filters frequently during smoke events and replace them when loaded.

4. Protect Occupants

Encourage employees with asthma, COPD, heart disease, or other respiratory conditions to minimize outdoor exposure.

Consider relocating sensitive employees away from areas where outside air enters the building.

If smoke infiltrates indoors significantly, portable HEPA air cleaners may help reduce indoor particulate levels.

5. Limit Smoke Entry

Keep exterior doors closed as much as practical.

Postpone activities that require prolonged opening of loading docks or large overhead doors when possible.

Signs That Additional Action May Be Needed

If employees report:

Smoke odor indoors

Eye, nose, or throat irritation

Coughing or difficulty breathing

Visible haze inside the building

Facility management should evaluate HVAC operation, inspect filtration systems, and consider additional engineering controls.

Resources

OSHA Indoor Air Quality Guidance

EPA AirNow (AQI): <https://www.airnow.gov>

EPA Best Practices for Commercial Buildings During Wildfire Smoke Events





Cook Professional Resources, Inc | PO Box 3488 | Worcester, MA 01613 US

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