

Wildfire preparedness is year-round

Written by gallupsun
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Due to the cooler weather conditions and higher moisture, fall is an important time for land managers to complete prescribed fire projects. Prescribed burning is a fire management tool used to reduce fuel loads and decrease fire behavior in the case of a wildfire – among other benefits. Prescribed fire and associated smoke may lower the chances of a much longer smoke event from wildfire.

Still, despite careful planning to conduct prescribed fire in ways that minimize harmful smoke exposure, smoke from prescribed burning does have an impact on air quality for a period of time. These impacts are mitigated and accounted by the New Mexico Environment Department's Air Quality Bureau and their smoke management system. There are ways that you can protect yourself and your loved ones from the effects of prescribed fire smoke. With that in mind, New Mexico's Forestry Division's theme for the month of October is "Prescribed Fire Smoke is in the Air – Be Prepared."

The best way to prepare for wildfire or prescribed fire smoke is to get accurate, up-to-date information on wildland fire activity in New Mexico. To get the best information on prescribed fire in your area, you can visit: nmfireinfo.com. For an interactive map or air quality, visit: fire.airnow.gov. For tips on how to mitigate your exposure to smoke, visit the American Lung Association's webpage.

LIMITING SMOKE EXPOSURE

- Reducing physical outdoor activity is an effective strategy to lower the dose of inhaled air pollutants and reduce health risks during a smoke event.
- Staying inside in a safe place with the doors and windows closed can reduce exposure to air pollution by at least a third or more.

FILTERING AIR

One of the best ways to reduce the impact of smoke is by reducing the amount of smoke that enters a building and filtering harmful particles from the air.

- If you have a central air conditioning system in your home, set it to re-circulate or close outdoor air intakes to avoid drawing in smoky outdoor air. Upgrading the filter efficiency of the

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HVAC system and changing filters frequently during smoke events greatly improves indoor air quality.

- Smaller portable air cleaners are a great way to provide clean air in the areas where you spend most of your time. These are filters with an attached fan that draws air through the filter and cleans it. These cleaners can help reduce indoor particle levels, provided the specific air cleaner is properly matched to the size of the indoor environment in which it is placed, and doors and windows are kept shut. They should be placed in the bedrooms or living rooms to provide the most effectiveness.

