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WILDFIRE SMOKE BILL PASSES LEGISLATURE AND HEADS TO GOVERNOR'S DESK

Legislation sponsored by Breathe Southern California will protect Californians from the adverse health effects of wildfire pollution

LOS ANGELES, CALIF., September 10, 2021 – Breathe Southern California commends the action by the California State Assembly to support Assembly Bill 619 (Calderon). The bill, which addresses the impact of wildfire smoke on public health, now heads to Governor Newsom, whose signature would make it state law.

AB 619 would require the California Department of Public Health to develop recommendations and guidelines for counties to use in establishing plans to address significant air pollution events, primarily those caused by wildfires. County plans would need to establish policies and procedures regarding air filtration masks and other protective equipment and how a county informs its residents about unhealthy air quality. The development of plans would involve consultation with key stakeholders, including government agencies, medical professionals, and nonprofit organizations.

Due to climate change, wildfires are becoming more common and more extreme, and the intensifying drought is a looming threat to the severity of future wildfires. As a result, fire season in California is starting earlier and ending later.

Researchers with the Scripps Institution of Oceanography at the University of California, San Diego found that the microscopic particles released in air from wildfire smoke are up to ten times more damaging to humans than particles released from other sources. A new Stanford study has found that breathing air polluted with wildfire smoke while pregnant increases the risk of premature birth.

“Over a dozen fires are currently burning throughout California,” said Breathe Southern California President & CEO Marc Carrel. “Not only do the flames bring about destruction of property and threaten human life, but wildfire smoke increases the risk of significant long-term health consequences for those breathing it in.”

Carrel explained that while the Dixie Fire, the states largest wildfire this year, and second largest ever, originated East of Chico, California, “the impact of that fire is felt throughout the Western United States, including Utah and Colorado, because the wildfire smoke has spread that far impacting the air quality for millions of people well beyond the boundaries of the fire itself.”

“Given what studies are telling us about the effects of wildfire smoke and grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic, it is as important as ever to protect respiratory health,” said Carrel. “We must provide those who are most at risk from the horrible impacts of wildfire smoke the necessary tools, resources, and information to effectively manage their health and wellbeing.”

California experienced its largest fire season in modern history in 2020 with over 8,100 fires burning almost 4.5 million acres of land. Of the five deadliest fires in California history, three of them have occurred since October 2017. The seven largest fires in California have all occurred since December 2017, including five in 2020 alone, and the still-burning Dixie Fire is now the second largest wildfire in California history.

Breathe Southern California recommends that if your area is impacted by wildfire smoke (and causes haze that often changes the color of the sun during the day), stay inside with your windows and doors closed, and use an air purifier with a high efficiency filter, or install a high efficiency filter in your air conditioner. Seek other shelter if you do not have air conditioning. When windows and doors are closed, do not make your indoor air quality worse by burning candles, lighting matches or incense, using a gas or propane stove, using aerosol sprays, smoking, vaping, vacuuming, or heating up cooking oils like olive oil that have a low “smoke point,” meaning it releases smoke at a low temperature.

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