

Occupational Health and Safety Alert and Advice

10 December 2019

Air Quality – NSW Bushfires

Bushfire smoke contains a mixture of gases and very fine particles that can be hazardous to health. Those most at risk are firefighters and outdoor workers.

The short-term health hazards include making asthma and chronic bronchitis/emphysema worse. People who suffer from chronic bronchitis/emphysema or heart conditions are at an increased risk and should take additional precautions.

Asthmatics may need to use their medications more often.

The World Health Organization Guidelines for good air quality is called the Air Quality Index (AQI)

An AQI less than 50 indicates that the air quality is good. At this low level, a person can spend time outdoors and air pollution will pose very little risk to their health. As the AQI number increases, so does the risk to human health.

Air Quality Index Levels of Health Concern	Numerical Value	Meaning
Good	0 to 50	Air quality is considered satisfactory, and air pollution poses little or no risk.
Moderate	51 to 100	Air quality is acceptable; however, for some pollutants there may be a moderate health concern for a very small number of people who are unusually sensitive to air pollution.
Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups	101 to 150	Members of sensitive groups may experience health effects. The general public is not likely to be affected.
Unhealthy	151 to 200	Everyone may begin to experience health effects; members of sensitive groups may experience more serious health effects.
Very Unhealthy	201 to 300	Health alert: everyone may experience more serious health effects.
Hazardous	301 to 500	Health warnings of emergency conditions. The entire population is more likely to be affected.

Sydney Air Quality 10 December 2019 recorded at 0900am:

Sydney East	1517
Sydney North West	1789
Sydney South West	1042

People most at risk from particle pollution exposure include **those with heart or lung disease (including asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease-COPD), older adults, and children.** Research indicates that pregnant women, newborns, and people with certain health conditions, such as obesity or diabetes, also may be more susceptible to Particulate Matter (PM)-related effects.

When the AQI is above 200 it is likely that even healthy people may experience eye, throat and nose irritation, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath. Exposure needs to be avoided by staying indoors and running an air conditioner, keeping activity levels low and avoiding activities that make you breathe faster and deeper.

If you have concerns about exposure in your workplace contact your union. If you or others are experiencing any of these symptoms you should seek medical advice.