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Unhealthy Air Quality From Wildfires Putting Vulnerable Communities At Risk

Tuesday, September 15, 2020

By [Tania Thorne](#)



Photo by [Matthew Bowler](#)

Above: The orange haze covering the San Diego skyline on Sept. 15, 2020, because of smoke from wildfires across California, including the Valley Fire in rural East County.

Smoke from the fires throughout California has impacted air quality levels in San Diego County, causing an advisory for vulnerable communities.

The [San Diego County Air Pollution Control District](#) rated air quality levels on Tuesday as “moderate and unhealthy” for residents who may be sensitive to particle pollution.

This includes people with respiratory conditions or heart disease, the elderly and young children. The county is urging them to limit physical and outdoor activity and, if possible, stay indoors to reduce exposure.

The particle pollution comes after the smoke from the [fires in Northern California](#) rose to the atmosphere. They've now blown south to San Diego.

The orange haze has lingered in the area because of the recent stagnant weather, said Rob Reider, San Diego County Air Pollution Control District deputy director.

"We're advising (Tuesday) and for the next few days for those that are sensitive to particle pollution to limit their exposure and try to stay indoors if possible," he said.

Diane Takvarian, executive director of [Environmental Health Coalition](#), said the current air quality conditions impact some neighborhoods in San Diego more than others.

"Air quality in certain areas in San Diego is problematic all the time, so when we have these fire events, it just adds to that problematic air quality," she said. "These are largely communities of color, low-income communities, particularly around Barrio Logan and National City.

The Environmental Health Coalition advocates for the use of lower-emission cars, cleaner power plants, and manufacturing facilities as a way to reduce pollution in San Diego and these highly affected neighborhoods.

Reider said data shows that the average temperatures in San Diego are climbing year-over-year and the climate has been drier. This puts California at an increased risk of wildfires and smoke pollution.

"Anything to reduce emissions tends to help both climate and air pollutions," he said. "We are as a region working on that."

The particles in the air should clear out by this weekend as more wind is expected to flow through San Diego County, Reider said.

In the meantime, those at greater risk are advised to stay indoors until air quality levels clear up.



The urgency of addressing human causes of climate change has long been apparent. To amplify this issue that's paramount to us all, KPBS has launched a [Climate Change Desk](#) to step up our coverage of this existential threat including reported stories and interviews with experts and newsmakers.

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San Diego

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