Wildfire Season is here and so are the Health Risks of Smoke

Nearly nine million acres burned in wildfires in the United States in 2018. Residents of Northern Colorado know that wildfires are a reality. While wildfires themselves present risks including danger to our homes and property, smoke from wildfire is harmful for air quality and health. Damage from smoke can render a home uninhabitable even if the flames were contained to one room.

Poudre Fire Authority (PFA) and the City of Fort Collins work together to help keep you informed and safe during wildfire season. Tips and resources will help protect you and your property. While PFA sends firefighters and information about the fire, the City of Fort Collins Air Quality program provides education and information on factors that can negatively impact air quality; including smoke from wildfires.

Smoke from regional or local wildfires can travel long distances and be inhaled into the lungs causing negative health effects. Smoke is made up of a mixture of gases and particles, including fine particulate matter, which can cause irritation to the eyes, coughing, wheezing and difficulty breathing. These effects are worse for at-risk groups such as children, the elderly and people with respiratory or heart problems.

How to Know if Air Quality is Affected

Smoke travels, which means people can be impacted even when fires are miles away. If you see or smell smoke, air quality may be affected. If visibility is especially poor from smoke, (e.g., less than five miles or approximately the distance from downtown to the “A” rock formation near Horsetooth), then the air quality is likely impacted.

Mitigate the impacts of smoke if there is a wildfire in the area by:

- Closing your home’s openings, including attic and basement doors, vents, garage doors and pet doors.
- Staying indoors if possible.
- Checking local air quality alerts to know if smoke is impacting air quality.
- Limiting physical activity.
- Running the fan on recirculate in your home and vehicle.
- Minimizing exposure to indoor air pollutants by avoiding activities such as burning candles or smoking inside.
• Keeping car windows closed while driving.
• Changing air filters regularly.

The dry climate and warm temperatures make the risk of wildfires and presence of smoke part of life on the Front Range, but awareness and preparation work. Sign up or follow these channels to help the information come to you.

3 Ways to Stay Informed This Summer:
1. Sign up for smoke and air quality alerts at fcgov.com/aqdata
2. Stay up to date on local fire risks and responses by following Poudre Fire Authority on social media @PoudreFire
3. Sign up for local alerts at www.nocoalert.org - decide how and when to receive alerts