

MEDIA RELEASE

SMOKY SKIES BULLETIN AMENDED FOR BC INTERIOR

Regions added: Bulkley Valley and The Lakes Northwest (including Smithers), Bulkley Valley and The Lakes Southwest (including Burns Lake)

(August 07, 2017 14:00 MDT - Cranbrook) The Ministry of Environment & Climate Change Strategy, in collaboration with the Interior and Northern Health Authorities has amended the area covered by the Smoky Skies Bulletin that was last updated on Thursday August 03 due to changing smoke conditions.

Areas now covered by this Bulletin include: 100 Mile, Arrow Lakes, Boundary, Bulkley Valley and The Lakes Northwest (including Smithers), Bulkley Valley and The Lakes Southwest (including Burns Lake), Cariboo North, Cariboo South, Chilcotin, East Columbia, East Kootenay, Elk Valley, Fraser Canyon, Kinbasket, Kootenay Lake, Kootenay Park, Nicola, North Columbia, North Thompson, Okanagan, Prince George, Shuswap, Similkameen, Slocan Lake, South Thompson, West Columbia, West Kootenay, Yellowhead, and Yoho Park.

Smoke concentrations will vary widely as winds, fire behaviour and temperatures change.

Avoid strenuous outdoor activities. If you are experiencing any of the following symptoms, contact your health care provider: difficulty in breathing, chest pain or discomfort, and sudden onset of cough or irritation of airways. Exposure is particularly a concern for infants, the elderly and those who have underlying medical conditions such as diabetes, and lung or heart disease.

This Bulletin will remain in effect until further notice.

Tips to reduce your personal health risk:

- People with heart or lung conditions may be more sensitive to the effects of smoke and should watch for any change in symptoms that may be due to smoke exposure. If any symptoms are noted, affected individuals should **take steps to reduce their exposure to smoke** and if necessary see their physician. People with symptoms should go to their health care provider, walk in clinic or emergency department depending on severity of

symptoms.

- Use common sense regarding outdoor physical activity - if your breathing becomes difficult or uncomfortable, stop or reduce the activity.
- Stay cool and drink plenty of fluids.
- Smoke levels may be lower indoors, however levels of smoke particles will still be increased. If you stay indoors, be aware of your symptoms.
- Consider visiting a location like a shopping mall with cooler filtered air. Keep in mind that staying indoors may help you stay cool and provide some relief from the smoke, however many air conditioning systems do not filter the air or improve indoor air quality.
- Reduce indoor pollution sources such as smoking or burning other materials.
- You may be able to reduce your exposure to smoke by moving to cleaner air. Conditions can vary dramatically by area and elevation.
- Residents with asthma or other chronic illness should activate their asthma or personal care plan.
- Pay attention to local air quality reports, air quality may be poor even though smoke may not be visible.
- Commercially available HEPA (high efficiency particulate air) filters can further reduce poor indoor air quality near the device.
- Maintaining good overall health is a good way to prevent health effects resulting from short-term exposure to air pollution.
- For general information about smoke and your health, contact HealthLink BC available toll free, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 8-1-1, or via the web at: <http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/kbaltindex.asp>.
- Real-time air quality information in B.C. is available at <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/air-land-water/air>.
- Visit <http://www.interiorhealth.ca>, click on the Your Environment tab at the top of the page, then Emergency Information - Forest Fire, and under the "During" tab, scroll to Your health and living with smoky skies.

Food safety and water quality tips:

- During a forest fire, it's also important to be aware of health risks associated with food safety in power outages and water quality.
- Interior Health's website contains helpful information and other resources related to forest fire smoke exposure / air quality, as well as food safety when the power is out and ensuring your drinking water is safe: <http://www.interiorhealth.ca>.

What is a Smoky Skies Bulletin?

- A Smoky Skies Bulletin is a new type of public notification being used by the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, in collaboration with the Interior Health Authority, to improve communication on wildfire smoke.

- It will be issued when smoke concentrations in an area have, or may, reach levels that are of concern for human health.
- Such decisions are based on satellite information, smoke transport models, photographs of visual air quality, first-hand observations from the area, in addition to concentrations of fine particulate matter recorded at local air quality stations.
- These differ from Wildfire Smoke Advisories issued by the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, which are based primarily on concentrations of fine particulate matter measured over a 24-hour period at fixed monitoring stations in various communities.
- A Smoky Skies Bulletin is intended to respond to the rapidly changing nature of wildfire smoke, in which smoke concentrations can vary significantly over short distances and periods of time that may not be well-characterised by the existing air quality monitoring network or responded to in a timely manner by Wildfire Smoke Advisories.
- A Smoky Skies Bulletin is not intended to manage local emission sources and therefore does not trigger actions under municipal bylaws and/or air discharge permit conditions.
- The key messages of a Smoky Skies Bulletin are:
 1. In most fire seasons, there are occasions when smoke from forest fires is carried into our region.
 2. Under these conditions, smoke concentrations may vary dramatically over short periods and over small distances.
 3. Those members of the public who are sensitive to the effects of smoke should monitor their symptoms and, if necessary, take steps to reduce their exposure to smoke.
 4. During the fire season, a heavy bluish-white haze, possibly accompanied by the smell of smoke, are clear indications that smoke concentrations are higher than usual. The concentrations and air quality health index measured at an air station many kilometres away may not be a good indication of local smoke conditions.

Contacts:

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