

**From:** [Pyke, Chris \(LNI\)](#)  
**To:** [Ireland, Cynthia D. \(LNI\)](#)  
**Subject:** WFS-comment FW: Indoor air quality requirements during fire season?  
**Date:** Tuesday, November 1, 2022 9:24:15 AM

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FYI

Chris Pyke, M.S. (*he/him*)  
Division of Occupational Safety & Health  
Asbestos Program & Technical Services  
Industrial Hygienist

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**From:** Matthew Trecha <mtrecha@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Monday, October 31, 2022 22:14  
**To:** Pyke, Chris (LNI) <chris.pyke@lni.wa.gov>  
**Subject:** Re: Indoor air quality requirements during fire season?

External Email

Thanks, Chris.

As you mentioned, if you're able to add any feedback into current rule drafting, it'd be appreciated.

I think something to the effect of "If an employee performs tasks that can be accomplished online at home during poor air quality events, they are allowed to do so if AQI is in excess of XXX" would be great.

I know I have air purifiers at home and - unlike my employer - am not pumping my home full of smokey air during the workday. The idea that we - as employees - can be forced to show up to type emails and work at a desk (no real 'in-person' responsibilities on my team and most white collar jobs these days it seems) and then have the "option" of wearing N-95 is truly surreal/disappointing.

Hope we can take all workers into consideration in rule-making and not just those outside.

Thanks again for your time and the very thorough responses!

Cheers,  
Matt Trecha

On Wed, Oct 26, 2022 at 3:02 PM Pyke, Chris (LNI) <[chris.pyke@lni.wa.gov](mailto:chris.pyke@lni.wa.gov)> wrote:

Matt,

I apologize that I was not able to respond before the smoke cleared, but I hope these answers will help you and your employer plan for the next wildfire season. I have included the answers to your questions below, and some additional information from

Department of Health.

1) What are employers required or advised to do for ventilation/HVAC systems during high intensity wildfire smoke/bad air quality in or around the office? Do they need to pump in outdoor air or can they shut ventilation/recycle indoor air during this time?

-The 2022 emergency rule for wildfire smoke included an exemption for *“Enclosed buildings or structures in which the employer ensures that windows, doors, bays, and other exterior openings are kept closed, except when it is necessary to briefly open doors to enter and exit”*. Additionally, the 2022 emergency rule expired September 29th, and unfortunately the department did not elect to extend the rule to cover the October smoke we experienced.

-The department is currently in the rulemaking process for the wildfire smoke permanent rule set to go into effect in 2023. <https://lni.wa.gov/safety-health/safety-rules/rulemaking-stakeholder-information/wildfire-smoke>

-The current draft of the permanent rule still includes the exemption for enclosed buildings. The exemption does not specify requirements for HVAC systems, but I will bring your comment to the rulemaking team to consider including some specific language about closing external air intakes for HVAC systems.

- WA Department of Health’s Smoke From Fires page has guidance on indoor air quality with smoke. See the FAQ “How can I improve filtration in my home to reduce smoke levels?” <https://doh.wa.gov/community-and-environment/air-quality/smoke-fires>

-As noted in the DOH guidance document, it is recommended to recirculate indoor air (and avoid drawing smoky air into the building), and filter the air with at least MERV 13 filters. Portable HEPA filters are also recommended to keep smoke levels indoors low. These are recommended, and not required by the L&I rule, but as you noted, wildfire smoke is dangerous even indoors and reducing exposure as much as possible is necessary to protect worker’s health.

2) Is there any requirement that our indoor air quality be below a certain AQI or does a 'right to clean air' here in Washington State exist when working indoors?

-The current draft of the rule is focused on outdoor workers and exempts indoors spaces.

3) What - if any - protections exist for employees during wildfire smoke season if their office is full of air quality that is the same as the outdoor air quality that is deemed 'unhealthy'?

-Unfortunately, the protections in the rule do not cover indoor workers if the

employer follows the exemption noted above. Indoor workers still are able to bring their own N95 respirators if it does not introduce other hazards into the workplace (N95 use would not introduce hazards into the typical office environment).

Chris Pyke, M.S. (*he/him*)  
Division of Occupational Safety & Health  
Asbestos Program & Technical Services  
Industrial Hygienist

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**From:** Miller, Christopher L (LNI) <[mics235@LNI.WA.GOV](mailto:mics235@LNI.WA.GOV)>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 18, 2022 21:19  
**To:** Pyke, Chris (LNI) <[chris.pyke@lni.wa.gov](mailto:chris.pyke@lni.wa.gov)>  
**Cc:** Gregersen, Kat (LNI) <[grka235@LNI.WA.GOV](mailto:grka235@LNI.WA.GOV)>  
**Subject:** FW: Indoor air quality requirements during fire season?

Smoke related question for you.

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**From:** Matthew Trecha <[mtrecha@gmail.com](mailto:mtrecha@gmail.com)>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 18, 2022 9:10 PM  
**To:** Miller, Christopher L (LNI) <[mics235@LNI.WA.GOV](mailto:mics235@LNI.WA.GOV)>  
**Subject:** Indoor air quality requirements during fire season?

External Email

Hi Christopher -

My employer's building has been regularly filled with smoky (smelling) air recently in the Everett area and the indoor air quality is as bad or worse than outdoors with employees coughing, eyes itching, etc.

Our facilities staff are claiming they have to let outdoor air in as part of the

ventilation requirements. I find this hard to believe when the AQI has been in the 150+ range - due to PM 2.5 - for the past several days, as a result of wildfires.

Could you please point me in the direction of the following or answer the below:

1) What are employers required or advised to do for ventilation/HVAC systems during high intensity wildfire smoke/bad air quality in or around the office?

Do they need to pump in outdoor air or can they shut ventilation/recycle indoor air during this time?

2) Is there any requirement that our indoor air quality be below a certain AQI or does a 'right to clean air' here in Washington State exist when working indoors?

3) What - if any - protections exist for employees during wildfire smoke season if their office is full of air quality that is the same as the outdoor air quality that is deemed 'unhealthy'?

Appreciate any guidance - mostly looking to show facilities that, yes, they can close off the outdoor air intakes when it's this bad outside (and, ideally, are required to).

Thanks,

Matt

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Matthew R. Trecha