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Public Health Message for Poor Outdoor Air Quality Due to Area Wildfires

November 21, 2012

Smoke from recent wildfires continues to settle around the Palouse and the Lewiston/Clarkston areas. As a result, an air quality alert from the National Weather Service continues in effect through Monday, September 24th. The current Washington Air Quality Advisory from the Washington State Department of Ecology is “**unhealthy for sensitive groups**”. Additionally, Governor Gregoire has issued an outdoor burning ban. The use of fireplaces and non-EPA certified wood burning stoves or inserts is also prohibited.

The forecast for the weekend weather offers no relief for the poor air quality. Dr. Brad Bowman, Whitman County Health Officer recommends limiting outdoor activity for the next 24-48 hours. Additionally, the Whitman County Public Health Department recommends taking suitable steps to protect the health impacts of the air quality on your health and safety.

For residents that are sensitive to air pollution this can result in health related issues. Whitman County Public Health stresses that residents that are at a higher risk of sensitivity (infants and children, adults 65 and older, pregnant women, diabetics, cigarette smokers, and those with pre-existing lung or cardiovascular illnesses) limit their time spent outdoors, especially when exercising. Air pollution can trigger asthma attacks, cause difficulty breathing, and make lung and heart problems worse.

People with lung or heart conditions may experience symptoms earlier than people who don't. Older adults often have unrecognized heart and lung conditions. People with these

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conditions are at greater risk of worsening disease, hospitalization, or death. Symptoms may include wheezing, shortness of breath, chest pain or discomfort, sudden overwhelming fatigue, and rapid heartbeat. Contact your health care provider if you are experiencing any of these symptoms. Call 911 if you cannot reach your provider.

Cooler temperatures are expected for eastern Washington next week, which should help reduce fire activity. However, the soaking rain needed to drastically improve the air quality is a notable absentee from the forecast. For additional information on the wildfire smoke and smoke related issues, please visit the following resources:

Washington State Department of Health

Smoke from fires:

<http://www.doh.wa.gov/CommunityandEnvironment/AirQuality/OutdoorAir/SmokeFromFires.aspx>

Washington State Department of Ecology

Air Monitoring Sites (GIS Map)

<https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/enviwa/Default.htm>

Washington Smoke Information

<http://wasmoke.blogspot.com/>

Air Resources Board

Wildfire Smoke: A Guide to Public Health

www.arb.ca.gov/carpa/toolkit/data-to-mes/wildfire-smoke-guide.pdf