

HB 2813 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

House Committee On Business and Labor

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Meeting Dates: 3/17

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Requires employers of employees who work outdoors and are exposed to wildfire smoke to provide certified respirators to employees to voluntarily wear while working outdoors when concentration levels of particulate matter 2.5 in the air are within the air quality index categories of 151 or greater (unhealthy, very unhealthy, or hazardous levels). Requires employers to require employees wear employer-provided certified respirators while working outdoor when the air quality index exceeds 500 (i.e., exceeds the hazardous level). Requires employers to determine concentration levels of particulate matter in the air. Exempts employers from monitoring air quality if employer requires employees to wear employer-provided respirators while performing outdoor work. Requires workplace posting in English and five most widely used non-English languages.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

According to the Public Health Division of the Oregon Health Authority, wildfire smoke is a mixture of gases and fine particulates. Particulates that are 2.5 micrometers (PM2.5) or smaller can be inhaled into the deepest part of the lungs. Wildfire smoke can cause the following: eye irritation, persistent cough, headache, shortness of breath, asthma attack, lung irritation, irregular heartbeat, chest pain, fatigue, and heart attack. The Division explains that N95 respirators, when properly fitted, can filter 95 percent of smoke particles. A wet towel or bandana will not block fine particulates (PM2.5).

The U.S. Air Quality Index is the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's index for reporting air quality for five major pollutants, including particulate matter 2.5. The EPA describes it as a yardstick that measures from 0 to 500. A higher value indicates a greater health concern, and six levels range from good to hazardous.