

## How Wildfires Affect Our Health



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by Editorial Staff | January 1, 2016

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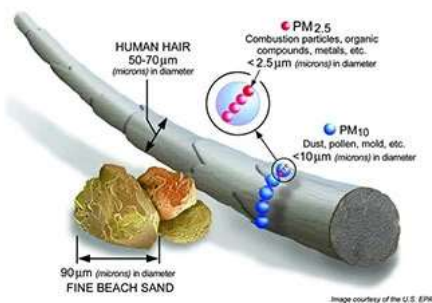
In recent years, wildfires have made headlines as they blazed across the west, Alaska and Canada, burning more than 9.8 million acres just last year, according to the [National Interagency Fire Center](#).

Not only were people forced to flee their homes, but smoke from fires in the north and west also threaten the lung health of Americans thousands of miles away. In fact, in one fire alone, wildfire pollutants reached people in North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota and Iowa from flames in northern Canada.

See this [dramatic photo from NASA](#) showing the smoke from that Canadian fire on June 29.

Wildfire smoke can be extremely harmful to the lungs, especially for children, older adults and those with asthma, COPD and bronchitis or a chronic heart disease or diabetes. [Even if you don't live near wooded areas, you can learn more on how to protect yourself from wildfire smoke.](#)

### Dangers of wildfire smoke



One of the many pollutants found in wildfire smoke is [particle pollution](#), which is a mix of very tiny solid and liquid particles suspended in air. How tiny? Many of the particles in wildfire smoke are no larger than one third the diameter of your hair. These particles are so small that they enter and lodge deep in the lungs.

Particle pollution triggers asthma attacks, heart attacks and strokes—and can kill. Studies of children in California found that children who breathed the smoky air during wildfires had more coughing, wheezing, bronchitis, colds, and were more likely to have to go to the doctor or to the hospital for respiratory causes, especially from asthma.

Another threat from forest fire smoke is [carbon monoxide](#) (CO)—a colorless, odorless gas most common during

Wildfires spread many other harmful emissions, including [nitrogen oxides](#) and many [hazardous air pollutants](#).

## Why so many fires?

In 2015, we had one of the worst fire seasons in the past decade, but each year sees tens of thousands of fires and millions of acres burned. Researches tell us climate change has contributed to fueling the flames of these wild fires.

[Climate change](#) has caused higher spring and summer temperatures and earlier spring snow-melt, which typically cause soils to be drier for longer, increasing the likelihood of drought and a longer wildfire season. And once wildfires ignite—whether by lightning strikes or a cigarette—these hot, dry conditions will increase the likelihood that the fire will be more intense and long-burning.

Wildfires threaten lives directly, and wildfire smoke can affect us all. They spread air pollution not only nearby, but thousands of miles away—causing breathing difficulties in even healthy individuals, not to mention children, older adults and those with heart disease, diabetes, asthma, COPD and other lung diseases.

Take wildfire threats seriously and [be prepared](#).

**Sources**
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