



MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release - Attention Editor

SMOKY SKIES BULLETIN ISSUED FOR EAST VANCOUVER ISLAND, SOUTHERN GULF ISLANDS, and GREATER VICTORIA

(August 1, 2017 - Nanaimo) The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, in collaboration with Island Health, has issued a Smoky Skies Bulletin for communities on the East Vancouver Island, the Southern Gulf Islands, and Greater Victoria due to wildfire smoke in the area. The current weather pattern over the BC coast is causing outflow winds to carry smoke from wildfires burning in the BC Interior towards the coast. Smoke concentrations will vary widely as winds, fire behaviour and temperatures change.

Exposure to increased smoke concentrations is particularly a concern for infants, the elderly and those who have underlying medical conditions such as heart or lung disease. Those at risk should avoid strenuous activities and prolonged exposure to smoke. Individuals, who experience any of the following symptoms, should contact their health care provider: difficulty in breathing, chest pain or discomfort, and sudden onset of cough or irritation of airways.

Should symptoms develop (such as an irritated throat or cough) individuals may wish to consider limiting their activity and exposure. Residents can stay informed of air quality and the air quality health index for their area by visiting <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/air-land-water/air>

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 for East Vancouver Island, Southern Gulf Islands and Greater Victoria is available at <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/air-land-water/air>.

What is a Smoky Skies Bulletin?

- A Smoky Skies Bulletin is a new type of public notice being issued by the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, in collaboration with Island Health, 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.
- This differs from the Fire Particulate 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.
- 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 Fire Particulate Advisories.

- A Smoky Skies Bulletin is not intended to manage for 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:
 - a) In most fire seasons, there are occasions when smoke from forest fires is carried into our region.
 - b) Under these conditions, smoke concentrations may vary dramatically over short periods and over small distances.
 - c) 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.
 - d) 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.

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