

## Summer Activities, Heat and Smoke

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In this, my final column for Wildfire Smoke Ready Week, I'm covering outdoor activities and coping with heat and smoke.

Some of us recreate outside, some of us work outside, and some of us have children who really, really, really need to burn off some energy. So, how to balance this against unhealthy air quality?

Fortunately, there are ways to reduce your outdoor exposure. Before heading outside, check the current air quality at [fire.airnow.gov](https://fire.airnow.gov) and then take a gander at the day's wildfire smoke forecast at [MissoulaCounty.us/CurrentAQ](https://MissoulaCounty.us/CurrentAQ). You can also call the Missoula Air Quality Hotline at 406-258-3600. All these resources will provide a current air quality health category that you can use to make decisions about your day.

Reducing activity levels can lower the amount of smoke you would otherwise take into your body. (Vigorous exercise such as running, playing basketball or soccer, and swimming all increase your dose of air pollution because you breathe deeper and more often during those activities.) The Montana DEQ and DPHHS also provide a handy guide for outdoor activities here: <https://dphhs.mt.gov/AirQuality>.

Pay attention to how your body responds to the smoke and respect the signals it sends you. People will react differently to the smoke, and the longer a smoke event drags on, the less smoke you'll be able to tolerate.

If you must work outside, or if you just really want to be outside even in smoky conditions, consider using a NIOSH-certified N95 respirator or well-fitting KN95 respirator. If you use a respirator, it should fit tight to your face so smoky air can't sneak in around the edges. A couple notes about N95 respirators: They do not come in children's sizes (although sometimes a size small will fit), and they are not super comfortable. If you find yourself constantly removing the respirator because you don't like feeling it against your face or you're having trouble breathing, consider reducing your exposure by staying inside in a place with cleaner air. Cloth masks, bandanas, gaiters, painter masks, etc. will not protect you from wildfire smoke. Replace your respirator when it's visibly dirty and do not use it if you struggle to breathe with it on.

If it's hot and smoky outside, what do you do? If you have air conditioning, use HEPA portable air cleaners (PACs), DIY fan/filter combos, your home furnace fan, or your central air handler to clean the indoor air (see previous columns).

But what about those of us without air conditioning? Here's the thing: Heat exposure is immediately dangerous to life and health. You must cool your home; that means opening your doors and windows and letting cooler, smoky air inside in the evening. It's not ideal. However, HEPA PACs, DIY combos, and efficient furnace filters are incredibly effective at cleaning indoor air quickly. (Note: Wait to turn your air cleaners on until after you've closed your doors and windows. Your air should be considerably cleaner within an hour.)

If you have a window A/C unit for just one room in your home, sleep in that room with the door closed and run your PAC or DIY combo to clean the air in that room while cooler, smokier air is in the rest of your house.

And remember, when it's smoky outside, check on your friends and neighbors. See if they have what they need to get through the season. And take heart: The snow will fly, the hockey puck will drop, the ski hill will reopen, and we'll all remember how great winter can be.

Be sure to visit [MontanaWildfireSmoke.org](https://MontanaWildfireSmoke.org) for information to get you through the coming wildfire season!