

Pender Harbour and Area Residents Association

... our communities association



Protecting Yourself from Wildfire Smoke

In the midst of wildfire season and approaching smoke from current wildfires in BC and Washington, it's time to start planning on protecting ourselves from the harms of wildfire smoke. Wildfire smoke causes episodes of the worst air quality that most people will ever experience in British Columbia. As climate changes, we can expect to experience more frequent wildfires, longer wildfire seasons, and as a result, more wildfire smoke. Wildfire smoke is a complex mixture of gases and small particles that change quickly as they move away from the fire. Of all the pollutants in wildfire smoke, the fine particulate matter (PM2.5) poses the greatest risk to human health.

Symptoms of wildfire smoke exposure and how to reduce your risk can be found here: [Wildfire Smoke](#)

Remember also that:

- a) when there's a simultaneous heat and smoke event, it's crucial to prioritize protecting yourself from the heat. In such situations, it may be necessary to open windows and doors to let in cooler air, despite the presence of smoke. Heat can be deadly faster than smoke, so it's essential to take steps to cool down quickly and safely; and
- b) If you need to work outside, both the Canadian and BC health authorities suggest wearing a properly fitted N95 mask.

Pender Harbour has air quality sensors to check for particulate matter (PM2.5). Location of sensors and data can be obtained by clicking this link: [Pender Harbour Air Quality Map](#) and, an Air Quality Health Index can be found here: [Air Quality Health Index Values](#)

Indoor Air Filtration

Portable air cleaners that use HEPA filtration can effectively remove smoke particles from the indoor air. There are many available on the market, but they can be costly. The Simon Fraser University has provided a design for an effective DIY fan useful for small spaces (approx. 400 square feet) at a much lesser cost (approx. \$75) using a 20" Lasko 80-watt box fan and a MERV 13 filter which can catch 75% of the PM2.5 particulate matter. Instructions on building your own fan are described here: [Wildfire Smoke Air Cleaner - DIY](#) or watch this short YouTube video: [PIPPS - DIY Air Cleaner](#)

Detailed information about wildfire smoke and its effects can be found in the resources below

[How to prepare for the wildfire smoke season](#)

[Portable air cleaners for wildfire smoke](#)

[Wildfire smoke and air quality](#)

[The composition of wildfire smoke](#)

[Wildfire smoke and outdoor exercise](#)

[Wildfire smoke & Air Quality Health Index \(AQHI\)](#)

[Face masks for wildfire smoke](#)

*Sources: Vancouver Coastal Health
BC Centre for Disease Control
SFU*