PASADENA PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES DURING WILDFIRE RECOVERY

How do I know if there are toxic substances in the air?

South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD) completed mobile air monitoring for lead, arsenic, benzene, methane, chromium and nickel in the Eaton Fire burn zone, including some neighborhoods in Pasadena. Air monitoring results indicate most substances were within background levels. Some elevated levels of lead, arsenic, chromium, and nickel were detected, primarily in Altadena neighborhoods. No elevated levels of benzene were detected. AQMD plans to launch stationary air monitoring sites to continue assessing air quality, which will help determine potential public health impacts.

Until more data about potential airborne toxic substances is available, measurements of particulate matter with a diameter of 2.5 micrometers or less (PM2.5) serve as a good proxy to assess if potential toxics are in the air. Poor air quality indicates pollutants (such as smog) are present and may also indicate if wildfire related contaminants are airborne. When air quality is good, it serves as an indicator that the level of pollutants in the air is low and considered within a normal background range.

Air quality measurements are provided at the AQMD and PurpleAir websites. These air quality resources are helpful to residents when making decisions about outdoor activities.

Is it safe for me to play on sports fields where I may come into contact with dirt or dust?

While there are no identified hazards, federal, state, and local jurisdictions are collaborating to collect soil samples in the Pasadena and Altadena communities at sites such as sports fields at parks. Pasadena Public Health Department (PPHD) is committed to transparency and providing test data to the public as soon as possible. PPHD will issue public health guidance if needed.

Until more data is available, PPHD encourages residents to use their discretion and avoid areas where ash, soot, or debris are visible. If residents are unsure about the safety of a sports field, they can take a cautious approach by wearing appropriate clothing to prevent direct skin contact with dirt or look for alternatives that reduce contact such as playing on grass or in an indoor area.

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (LACDPH) has launched a post-fire air, soil, and water post-fire assessment dashboard which shares the latest findings from several independent research efforts. PPHD will continue to partner with LACDPH to convene experts to assess environmental impacts related to the Eaton Fire.

Is it safe to exercise outside?

Exercising outside when air quality is good or moderate is highly encouraged and supports mental health, physical health, and overall wellbeing. When air quality is unhealthy, residents should avoid exercising outdoors. If you are unsure about air quality in your area, check the air quality index the day of the activity. Exposure and the resulting health effects from exercising outdoors during poor air quality depend on the amount of time spent outside, level of exertion, level of air pollution, and existing health conditions.

Is it safe for my child to exercise outside?

Parents, caregivers, and coaches are encouraged to check the air quality daily and limit outdoor activities when air quality is unhealthy. When air quality is unhealthy, children with existing respiratory, lung, or heart conditions should limit their exposure by staying indoors.

What are some resources I can refer to?

Smoke Ready California

Guidance for Parents & Caregivers After A Wildfire

Health and Safety Guidance for Early Childhood Education (ECE) Facilities After A Wildfire