

MEDIA RELEASE

SMOKY SKIES ADVISORY ISSUED FOR PORT RENFREW AREA & COWICHAN VALLEY, INCLUDING COWICHAN LAKE, DUNCAN, CROFTON, COBBLE HILL, MILL BAY & SHAWNIGAN LAKE

August 13, 2015 – Vancouver Island. The Ministry of Environment, in collaboration with Island Health, has issued a Smoky Skies Advisory for the Port Renfrew area & the Cowichan Valley, including Cowichan Lake, Duncan, Crofton, Cobble Hill, Mill Bay & Shawnigan Lake because of forest fire smoke that is covering the area. 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 www.bcairquality.ca

This advisory 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, COPD or other chronic illness should activate their asthma, respiratory 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 in for B.C. is available at <http://www.bcairquality.ca>.

Food safety and water quality tips:

- During a forest fire, it's also important to be aware of health risks associated with food safety in power outages and water quality.
- During a forest fire, it's also important to be aware of health risks associated with food safety in power outages and water quality. Island Health's website contains helpful information and other resources related to forest fire smoke exposure / air quality and water quality: http://www.viha.ca/mho/public_health_alerts/wildfires-smoke.htm

Contacts: For media and public questions regarding air quality and this advisory.
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For media questions regarding health implications of wildfires.
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