

# Protecting Workers from Wildfire Hazards: Workplace Safety Strategies



Wildfires pose serious risks to workers in affected regions, not just from the flames themselves but also from hazardous air quality, physical dangers, and long-term health concerns. Employers and employees alike must prioritize safety before, during, and after a wildfire event. Here's how to better protect workers in wildfire risk management and planning.

## 1. Preparing Workers for Wildfire Risks

### Know the Risks

- Identify wildfire-prone areas and establish emergency response plans.
- Ensure employees are aware of evacuation routes and shelter-in-place protocols.
- Provide wildfire safety training, including hazard recognition and protective measures.

### Air Quality & Respiratory Protection

- Wildfire smoke contains fine particulate matter (PM2.5) and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that pose respiratory risks.
- Monitor air quality levels through the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Air Quality Index (AQI).
- Provide N95 respirators or P100 masks for outdoor workers when AQI levels indicate unhealthy conditions.

### Emergency Communication Plans

- Establish a clear system for alerting workers of wildfire threats, evacuation orders, and shelter-in-place advisories.
- Use text alerts, phone trees, or communication apps to ensure timely updates.
- Designate a wildfire safety coordinator to lead emergency response efforts.

## 2. Workplace Protection Strategies During a Wildfire

### Evacuation and Shelter-in-Place Procedures

- Employers should identify safe zones, including fire-resistant buildings and shelters.
- Conduct regular evacuation drills to familiarize employees with emergency procedures.
- Keep emergency exits clear and ensure all workers know where to go in case of a fire.

### Protecting Outdoor Workers

- Adjust work schedules to minimize exposure during peak wildfire conditions.
- Provide PPE, including fire-resistant clothing and eye protection.
- Encourage frequent hydration and limit strenuous activities during poor air quality days.

### Post-Fire Reentry and Cleanup

- Wait for clearance from emergency responders before allowing workers to return to the affected area.



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- Workers engaged in cleanup efforts should wear protective gear, including gloves, respirators, and protective clothing.
- Assess structural integrity before reoccupying buildings and ensure proper ventilation to remove smoke residues.

## 3. Long-Term Health Considerations for Workers

### Addressing Air Quality and Health Effects

- Wildfire smoke exposure has been linked to respiratory and cardiovascular issues, particularly for individuals with pre-existing conditions.
- Implement indoor air filtration systems and HVAC maintenance to improve workplace air quality.
- Offer health screenings and medical evaluations for employees exposed to wildfire conditions.

### Psychological Support and Recovery

- Wildfires can cause trauma, stress, and anxiety for workers and their families.
- Provide access to mental health resources, counseling services, and employee assistance programs (EAPs).
- Encourage workers to maintain routines and engage in community rebuilding efforts to foster resilience.



## 4. Preventative Measures for Future Wildfire Events

### Workplace Fire Prevention Plans

- Implement fire-resistant landscaping around worksites to create defensible space.
- Regularly clear dry vegetation, debris, and other potential fire fuels from workplace surroundings.
- Conduct fire drills and update evacuation plans annually.

### Investing in Fire-Resilient Infrastructure

- Use fire-resistant materials in construction and workplace modifications.
- Install air filtration and ventilation systems designed to handle wildfire smoke.
- Develop business continuity plans to minimize economic disruption during wildfire seasons.

## 5. Resources for Employers and Employees

- EPA's Air Quality Monitoring: [www.airnow.gov](http://www.airnow.gov)
- OSHA Wildfire Safety Guidelines: [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov)
- CDC Guidance on Wildfire Smoke Exposure: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)



By prioritizing workplace wildfire safety, employers can protect their most valuable asset—their people. Implementing proactive safety measures, providing proper training, and ensuring access to protective equipment will help minimize risks and ensure that workers remain safe during and after wildfire events.

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