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Contact: Jose Arballo Jr, RUHS-Public Health
Public Health Public Information Specialist
Office: 951.358.5599 Cell: 951.712.3705
Email: jarballojr@ruhealth.org

Health officials warn residents about dangers of smoke and ash from fires in northwest Riverside County

Health officials are urging residents in portions of northern Riverside County to limit outdoor activities because of smoke and ash generated by the Sandalwood, Reche and Wolf fires.

The three fires, which started Thursday in Calimesa, north of Moreno Valley, and near Banning, have blackened hundreds of acres and sent up a large columns of black smoke that could be seen throughout the region. Many residents in northern Riverside County neighborhoods may have found driveways and homes covered in white ash that may fall onto cars, settled into pools and onto sidewalks.

In Calimesa, more than 70 homes were destroyed by wind-whipped flames.

“Ash and smoke can be hard on anyone to breathe, but especially those with lung disease and respiratory illnesses,” said Dr. Cameron Kaiser, Riverside County public health officer. “Everyone worries about the flames, but smoke can impact you even if you’re miles away from the fire. There are some simple steps residents can take to protect themselves.”
The smoke and ash advisory has been issued by Kaiser for portions of northern Riverside County, including Calimesa, Moreno Valley, Banning and Beaumont.

Among the precautions:
--Residents should avoid any vigorous outdoor or indoor exertion.
--Those with respiratory or heart disease, older adults, and children should remain indoors.
--Windows and doors should be closed.
--Run your air conditioner if you have one and keep the fresh air intake closed and the filter clean to prevent bringing additional smoke inside.
--Avoid using a swamp cooler or whole-house fan to prevent bringing additional smoke inside.
--To avoid worsening the health effects of smoke, don’t use indoor or outdoor wood-burning appliances, including fireplaces.

The fire could burn for several days, so residents can get updates on air quality by clicking on www.rivcoph.org and fire updates at www.fire.ca.gov