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Missoula County Encourages Preparation During Fourth Annual Wildfire Smoke Ready Week

As summer heats up, so does the risk of wildfire. And with fire, wildfire smoke inevitably creeps into the valleys. Local public health experts, climate advocates and local government encourage Missoula County residents to educate and prepare themselves for the hazards of wildfire smoke during **Wildfire Smoke Ready Week**.

The Missoula County Commissioners and the City of Missoula have proclaimed July 8- 13 as Wildfire Smoke Ready Week, and a Missoula-area Wildfire Smoke Ready Team has organized a week of outreach about the risks posed by wildfire smoke and the simple strategies everyone can take to reduce their exposure and protect their health.

The team will post tips on social media (#WildfireSmokeReady), and volunteers and staff will be at this Saturday's farmers markets in downtown Missoula, Wednesday's Out to Lunch at Caras Park, and the Missoula Public Library (July 12, 2-4pm) to share options to create clean indoor air. Everyone is invited to engage with the team, share social media, and check out MontanaWildfireSmoke.org for information about portable air cleaners and filters, making your own air cleaner, using a forced air system to keep your indoor air safer, and coping with the double whammy of smoke and heat!

"Our team is excited to have a dedicated week to share what we've learned over the years to keep our communities safe," said Amy Cilimburg, Climate Smart Missoula's executive director. "Wildfire seasons have become longer and more severe due in part to human caused climate change —and extreme wildfire smoke events have become more common. This summer is suddenly heating up, and we may see more wildfire smoke than we have for the past few years. It's time to prepare!"

Wildfire smoke is the most significant source of air pollution in western Montana, and it is a serious health threat. Wildfire smoke exacerbates asthma and COPD, increases the risk of heart attack and stroke, increases susceptibility to infectious respiratory diseases and increases hospitalizations and deaths. While smoke is bad for everyone, children, teenagers, older adults, pregnant people, people with heart and lung disease, and people who can't avoid exposures, such as outdoor workers and people living outside, are at greater risk of health impacts. For all, the longer you're in it, the worse it gets.

"Wildfire smoke affects everyone's health differently and we need to keep that in mind. When wildfire smoke arrives, listen to your body and seek out indoor activities in cleaner air or less intense outdoor activities," said Kerri Mueller, air quality specialist with Missoula Public Health. "Wildfire Smoke Ready Week is the perfect opportunity to learn about ways to protect yourself from smoke and create an action plan. Get Wildfire Smoke Ready now and thank yourself later!"

Fortunately, relatively inexpensive interventions, such as portable air cleaners and efficient HVAC filters, can mitigate many of the risks that wildfire smoke poses.

"Because wildfire smoke comes indoors, the old public health messaging of 'shut your doors and windows' is no longer sufficient," said Sarah Coefield, air quality specialist with Missoula Public Health.

“Folks need to take some simple proactive measures to filter their air. We’ve learned a lot about creating cleaner indoor air spaces since the 2017 wildfire season, and I’m excited to take part once again in our Wildfire Smoke Ready Week to better prepare our community for what could be a gnarly smoke season.”

Our changing summers can be daunting, but together we can prepare and get Wildfire Smoke Ready!

The Wildfire Smoke Ready team includes representatives from Missoula Public Health, Climate Smart Missoula, United Way of Missoula County, Missoula County Fire Protection Association, Missoula County Ecology & Extension, and Missoula County Climate & Sustainability.

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