Report Summary:
"Can Prescribed Fires Mitigate Health Harm? A Review of Air Quality and Public Health Implications of Wildfire and Prescribed Fire"

Background: The American Lung Association commissioned a report, written by PSE Healthy Energy, to answer the question: What does the current research say about the potential of prescribed fire to mitigate the increasing health and air quality risks from catastrophic wildfires, considering that prescribed fire involves air quality and health risks too?

Rationale: Climate change is increasing the likelihood of catastrophic wildfires, putting lung health in danger of wildfire smoke. The Lung Association champions action to curb greenhouse gases to mitigate climate change, but must of the nation is already suffering from more frequent and more extreme wildfires, and additional policy options are urgently needed to protect lung health.

Definition: Prescribed fire is defined as the planned ignition of an area in accordance with applicable regulations and laws as a means of reducing "fuel loadings" (combustible content that could burn during wildfires) and wildfire risk of vulnerable regions, as well as to improve ecosystem health. Prescribed fire is not appropriate for all ecosystems. Prescribed fire, in this report, does not refer to agricultural burning, which involves the intentional burning of croplands and is conducted for reasons other than wildfire management purposes.

Key Findings from the Report:

- **Wildfire activity is predicted to increase in the decades ahead and expanded prescribed fire activity is needed to mitigate wildfire risk and associated impacts.**
- **Prescribed fire can be used to mitigate the negative air quality, health, and safety impacts of large-scale wildfires.** Prescribed fire can simultaneously reduce fuels to reduce wildfire risk while supporting ecosystem health and resiliency.
- **Existing research supports the notion that historical fire suppression policies are insufficient for longer-term fire management.** Fire suppression has been shown to defer, rather than mitigate, air quality and health burdens associated with smoke. These strategies result in increased fire intensity and an increase in the number of people exposed in a single smoke event.
- **While increasing prescribed fire activities may contribute to local air quality impacts, prescribed fire can be conducted in ways that minimize harmful smoke exposure potential.** Prescribed fires are implemented under planned, predictable circumstances where additional measures can be taken to minimize exposures.
- **Expanded prescribed fire activities should be coupled with additional policies and best practices to mitigate potential harmful smoke exposure.**
- **Further research is needed to evaluate comparative risks of prescribed fire smoke and wildfire.**

For more information, visit the full report here.

For resources on how individuals can protect themselves from wildfire smoke, visit www.lung.org/wildfire.