



Wildfires are a public health crisis. Here's what we can do.



Smoke from wildfires can produce life-threatening levels of air pollution. Wildfire smoke can travel hundreds or thousands of miles, exposing millions to dangerous pollution. Climate change is fueling more frequent and intense wildfires. Furthermore, decades of fire suppression inadvertently created wildland areas primed with dangerous amounts of fuel.

Policymakers and health professionals must promote solutions that protect community health alongside fire responses, land management, and community preparedness. **Approaches to reducing exposure to wildland fire smoke fall into three sections:**

1. Decreasing Wildfire Fuels & Smoke

Prescribed fire – the careful burning of vulnerable areas under controlled conditions – reduces dangerous fuel buildup that could escalate a smaller wildland fire into a catastrophic one, lowering the frequency, severity, and health impacts of wildland fires.

Spotlight

In 2021, Washington State passed the Wildfire Response, Forest Restoration, and Community Resilience Account – **an eight-year, \$500 million investment in prescribed fire, forest health, and community wildfire risk reductions.**

2. Mitigating Smoke Exposure

Policymakers and community leaders can prepare for poor air quality days by ensuring everyone has access to resources that reduce exposure to air pollution, protecting the most vulnerable before dangerous smoke arrives.

Spotlight

In 2019, **California created a \$5 million pilot program to upgrade ventilation systems and provide portable air cleaners for residents displaced by wildfires or smoke.** Today, a wide network of libraries, community centers, and other [clean air centers](#) remains available statewide.

3. Preparing More Resilient Communities

Local and state public health officials are trusted voices experienced in communicating the dangers of smoke exposure and connecting communities to resources. They can develop policies that mitigate wildfire impacts.

Spotlight

[Smoke Ready Gorge](#) built a community-wide educational campaign on both sides of the Columbia River, **deploying a network of local air monitoring stations – including indoor and outdoor monitors at some K-12 schools.**



To protect health and restore more fire resilient landscapes, **action is needed at local, state, and federal levels to better respond before, during and after wildland fires occur.**

Read the Full
Policy Brief at
[Lung.org](https://www.lung.org)

