



WESTERN CANADIAN OUTDOOR MUSIC FESTIVALS GUIDE TO WILDFIRE SMOKE

A Toolkit for Organizers

CALGARY
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MUSIC
FESTIVAL



Canada

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The Calgary Folk Music Festival is located in Moh'kins'tsis, the Blackfoot name for what is now known as Calgary on Treaty 7 Territory. In the spirit of respect and reciprocity with our treaty partners we acknowledge the ancestral home, culture, and oral teachings of the Treaty 7 signatories which include the Siksika Nation, Piikani Nation, Kainai Nation, the Îethka Stoney Nakoda Nation, consisting of the Chiniki, Bearspaw and Good Stoney Bands and the people of the Tsuut'ina Nation. This area is also home to the historic Northwest Métis and to the Otipemisiwak Métis Government, Métis Nation Battle River, Nose Hill Métis District 5 and Elbow Métis District 6. Awareness of the land and elements is embedded in every moment of vision and logistical planning within the Folk Festival Society of Calgary. We are seeing the impacts of climate change on our outdoor festivals and events. Maintaining our connection and reverence for the land and how we gather and build community on it, is a commitment made by staff and board as well as our volunteers, patrons, artists and sponsors year-round.

Alberta Capital Airshed acknowledges that we operate on Treaty 6 territory – the traditional and ancestral territory of many First Nations, including the Cree, Dene, Blackfoot, Saulteaux, and Nakota Sioux. We acknowledge that this territory is home to the Métis Nation of Alberta. We honour the many First Nations, Métis and Inuit who have lived on this land since time immemorial, by being thoughtful about the air we breathe, and how we can work to ensure it is healthy and lifegiving for our earth, the current generation, and for many generations to come.

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Glossary

Air Pollution

Harmful substances in the air, such as smoke, chemicals, or gases, that can affect health and the environment.

Air Purifier

A device that removes pollutants like smoke, dust, and allergens from indoor air, improving air quality.

Air Quality

A measure of how clean or polluted the air is, based on the presence of pollutants.

AQHI (Air Quality Health Index)

A tool that tells you how air pollution affects your health on a scale from 1 (low risk) to 10+ (very high risk).

AQHI-Based Response Plan

A plan that outlines what actions to take based on AQHI levels to protect health, especially for those at greater risk.

At-Risk

People more likely to be harmed by air pollution, such as seniors, young children, and those with heart or lung conditions.

Cleaner Air Space

A designated indoor location that has been prepared to provide relief from poor air quality, particularly wildfire smoke. These spaces are designed to maintain good indoor air quality using advanced filtration, portable air cleaners, and/or ventilation controls. The air quality is monitored to ensure PM_{2.5} levels are significantly lower than outdoors.

PM_{2.5} (Fine Particulate Matter)

Tiny airborne particles under 2.5 micrometers wide that can penetrate deep into the lungs and cause health issues, is often present in wildfire smoke.

OHS (Occupational Health and Safety)

Rules and practices that protect workers from health and safety risks, including those related to air quality.

Public Cleaner Air Space

A public place, like a community centre or senior centre, that has been set up with clean air measures (like air purifiers) where people can go during poor air quality events.

Wildfire Smoke Event

A period when smoke from wildfires affects air quality in a region, often for hours or days, but can last for weeks.



Executive Summary

The *Western Canadian Outdoor Music Festivals Guide to Wildfire Smoke: A Toolkit for Organizers* supports outdoor festival and event organizers in mitigating risk and responding to wildfire smoke, an increasingly common challenge across Western Canada and beyond. Designed for operational staff (both paid and volunteer) as well as Boards, the guide provides practical direction to support informed decision-making, risk management, and organizational resilience. It also helps inform funders, municipalities, government decision-makers, and the insurance industry about the real impacts of wildfire smoke on outdoor events.

Wildfire smoke poses a significant threat to the financial sustainability of not-for-profit festivals. Impacts can include a substantial decline or complete loss of ticket sales, alongside ongoing contractual obligations to artists and suppliers. Conditions can shift rapidly; a change in wind direction may force cancellations while still requiring full payment of fees.

Smoke events also require clear, timely communication with volunteers and the public. While often approached in the same way as weather, wildfire smoke demands a different lens: it can intensify quickly with little warning, yet dissipate just as fast, allowing activities to resume. Operating with limited staff and heavy reliance on volunteers, not-for-profit festivals need practical tools to respond in real time. This guide provides a flexible decision-making framework to support both event planning and on-the-ground response.

Recognizing that every festival operates differently, the guide is not prescriptive. Instead, it offers a foundation for organizations to assess their risks, build resilience, and develop best practices over time, both individually and across the sector.

It also supports organizers in clearly communicating risks and responses to funders, artists, volunteers, audiences, and the broader community. This guide is intended as a starting point for ongoing learning, adaptation, and sector-wide alignment.





How To Use This Guide

This guide brings together expertise from across the festival, health, and risk management landscape. Because wildfire smoke impacts multiple aspects of festival operations, you will hear from several contributors throughout the document, each offering perspective within their area of expertise.

To help you navigate, content is presented in two ways:

1. **Core Guidance** – The main body of the guide reflects consistent, practical direction for festival planning and operations.
2. **Expert Insights** – Call-outs and highlighted sections provide additional context from subject matter experts.

Each expert voice is clearly identified so you can quickly understand the lens being applied:

Legal Perspective Considerations related to duty of care, liability, and regulatory context.	Insurance Perspective Risk transfer, coverage implications, and insurability.	Festival Leadership Real-world decision-making, operational realities, and lessons learned.
Air Quality Specialists Technical interpretation of air quality data, including AQHI-based guidance.	Meteorological Insights Understanding smoke behaviour, forecasting, and changing conditions.	Guide Author Integrated guidance to connect these perspectives into actionable steps.

These perspectives are complementary. Together, they are intended to support informed, balanced decision-making in dynamic wildfire smoke conditions.

A full list of contributors is provided in the front matter of this document.

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose and Scope of the Guidebook

The *Western Canadian Outdoor Music Festivals Guide to Wildfire Smoke: A Toolkit for Organizers* is designed to support outdoor festivals and event organizers with a practical framework for decision-making in the face of wildfire smoke.

Wildfire smoke events are becoming more frequent, prolonged, and severe. Their impacts on outdoor events can be wide-ranging from operational disruptions and stakeholder communication challenges to significant, and potentially catastrophic, financial consequences. While wildfire smoke is not new to Western Canada, the lengthening smoke season has made proactive planning and response across the full event lifecycle increasingly critical.

Developed in partnership with subject matter experts from Alberta Capital Airshed (ACA), their collaborators, legal experts (who are also Calgary Folk Music Festival volunteers), and an insurance broker with a decades-long understanding of how not-for-profit festivals work, this guide provides a foundational resource to help organizers better plan for and respond to wildfire smoke events.

Its broader aim is to support the development of consistent practices across the sector, strengthening resilience for festivals and events across Western Canada and beyond.

1.2 Outdoor Events in a Changing Climate

Planning and executing outdoor events has always carried inherent risk due to weather uncertainty. In a changing climate, that uncertainty is increasing. Concerns that were once mainly focused on low temperatures and rain (or snow in warmer months) have expanded to include severe weather events, storms, heatwaves, and other hazardous conditions. All festival organizers have a duty to produce a safe event and municipal partners are requiring increasingly robust safety and risk management throughout the lifecycle of the event. At the same time, increasingly unpredictable and/or severe weather events carry significant financial considerations, including increased expenses to support mitigation strategies, and potential costs associated with an event cancellation.



1.3 Risks to Health, Safety, and Sector Stability

The success of an outdoor event is reliant on human power to set it up, run the event, perform, vend, attend, and tear it down. Festivals are a people business. The reliance on people and their ability to work and/or attend when there is a possible health concern, such as wildfire smoke, poses an inherent operational vulnerability. Event organizers have a duty to ensure safety throughout the lifecycle of the event for all participants. The increased risks, the additional efforts and financial resources required to plan for and respond to a wildfire smoke event can strain events of all sizes within an impacted region. Should conditions require a partial or full event cancellation, sector stability could be further impacted by the financial fallout for an event or series of events. The impact of several days of severe wildfire smoke could result in years of financial recovery for an organization. At present, there are limited financial supports available to offset losses related to wildfire smoke-driven cancellations. As this issue continues to evolve, there is an opportunity for governments and partners to consider mechanisms that help reduce long-term sector impacts.

1.4 Need for Coordinated Approach and Policy Supports

Instances of wildfire smoke impacting outdoor festivals have become increasingly prevalent in the last decade. Despite that fact, event organizers have been, for the most part, left to figure it out on their own. There is a need for a coordinated approach in the sector to work with all levels of government, for the purposes of coordinated communication to advocating for potential emergency funding. There are few, if any, affordable insurance products that can help mitigate the financial risks should a festival or event have to cancel due to wildfire smoke while still being contractually obligated to pay their expenses. Through the development of best practices the intention is to set a standard and framework for decision making that could enable advocacy for the sector.



2 Science of Wildfire Smoke

2.1 Why Wildfire Smoke Matters: Increasing Frequency and Health Impacts

Wildfire smoke is becoming a more common concern during Canadian summers. With climate change expected to increase both the number and severity of wildfires, we can expect even more days with poor air quality.¹

Wildfire smoke contains harmful substances including particulate matter, carbon monoxide, and other gases. Exposure to these can cause serious physical health problems, including respiratory issues and heart complications, and make existing conditions, like asthma, worse. Mentally, it has been linked to higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression.^{2 3}

By planning ahead, outdoor event organizers can take proactive steps to protect health and build resilience. With the right preparation, we can all be better equipped to handle the challenges posed by wildfire smoke events.

Video – [How Does Wildfire Smoke Affect My Health?](#)



- 1 Government of Canada, *Health in a Changing Climate. Chapter 5: Overview of Climate-Related Health Impacts Associated with Air Quality*. Retrieved from <https://changingclimate.ca/health-in-a-changing-climate/chapter/5-0/>
- 2 Public Health Agency of Canada. (July 2024). *Wildfires in Canada: Toolkit for Public Health Authorities*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/wildfires-canada-toolkit-public-health-authorities.html>
- 3 Health Canada. (May 2024). *Wildfire smoke and your health*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/healthy-living/wildfire-smoke-health.html>

2.2 Monitoring Wildfire Smoke

HOW AIR QUALITY MONITORING WORKS:⁴

Air Pollution Sources: Pollution is emitted into the air from a variety of human-made and natural sources. In recent years, wildfire smoke has become a major source of air pollution in Western Canada.

Monitoring: air monitoring stations and other monitoring technologies measure concentrations of pollutants in the air. There are a variety of technologies currently deployed across Western Canada, including:

- *Continuous Monitoring Stations (CMS):* High-precision, regulatory-grade stations that measure multiple pollutants in real time and produce official Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) values⁵; costly (\$300,000+ to set up), and technically complex. The National Air Pollution Surveillance Program is Canada's main source of outdoor air quality data, and includes over 280 monitoring stations across Canada.⁶ *Note: FEM (Federal Equivalent Method) sites are CMS sites in Canada (as referenced on the UNBC AQ Map).*
- *Intermediate Monitors (e.g., Aeroqual, Bettair, AQ Egg):* Mid-range monitors that can track multiple pollutants and weather parameters; capable of producing unofficial AQHI data, offering a balance between cost, portability, and accuracy.
- *Particulate Matter Microsensors (e.g., PurpleAir):* Low-cost, community-friendly sensors that primarily measure PM_{2.5} that provide hyper-local data, but can be affected by poor siting (being too close to nearby sources like traffic or cooking). These offer alternatives to measure outdoor air quality in smaller and less accessible communities and fill gaps in densely populated monitoring networks. They respond and perform well in extreme events such as wildfire smoke.⁷

Data Management: Data from monitoring sites are collated for reporting to regulators and stakeholders and analyzed for insights and trends in air quality.

Quality Assurance and Validation: Data and reports are scrutinized to ensure accuracy.

Data Reports and Public Information: Data is used to calculate the AQHI. Low-cost sensors are used to inform real-time conditions in hyper-local settings that only consider PM_{2.5} during wildfire smoke events.

2.3 What is a Wildfire Smoke Event?

Wildfire smoke is a seasonal health risk across Canada, especially during the spring, summer, and fall. Whether the fire is nearby or thousands of kilometers away, the smoke can cause a noticeable decline in air quality, often leading to dangerous levels of harmful pollutants in the air. **These events can last anywhere from a few hours to several days or weeks.**

The main public health concern when exposed to wildfire smoke is pollution from fine particles, also known

4 Alberta Capital Airshed. *How monitoring works*. Retrieved from <https://capitalairshed.ca/how-monitoring-works/>

5 Environment and Climate Change Canada. *About the Air Quality Health Index*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/air-quality-health-index/about.html>

6 Environment and Climate Change Canada. *National Air Pollution Surveillance Program (NAPS)*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/air-pollution/monitoring-networks-data/national-air-pollution-program/what-it-is.html>

7 Government of Northwest Territories. *NWT Small Air Quality Sensors: Community Based Air Monitoring Project*. Retrieved from https://www.gov.nt.ca/ecc/sites/ecc/files/resources/technical_information_air_monitoring_sensor.pdf

as particulate matter (PM). The most concerning type is PM_{2.5}, which consists of tiny particles less than 2.5 micrometers in size.^{8,9} PM refers to a mixture of tiny solids or liquid droplets, including smoke, soot, dirt, and dust found in the air.

2.4 Health Effects and Special Considerations

Anyone may experience symptoms when exposed to poor air quality. The particles in wildfire smoke can irritate your respiratory system and make it harder for your lungs to get oxygen into your blood. Wildfire smoke can trigger an immune response which may lead to inflammation and other side effects throughout your body.

Most health effects of short-term wildfire smoke will improve for healthy adults and children as the air quality improves. **Common symptoms** include eye irritation, a runny nose, sore throat, mild cough, phlegm, wheezing, and headaches.¹⁰

More **severe symptoms** to watch for include shortness of breath, severe cough, dizziness, chest pain, or heart palpitations. Wildfire smoke inhalation may be particularly harmful to individuals with asthma or other lung diseases, diabetes, or heart disease. Smoky air may make some infections worse, such as pneumonia, COVID-19, and ear infections in children.^{11, 12}

Certain groups of people are more at risk of serious health problems when exposed to wildfire smoke. This is because their bodies may not be able to handle the pollutants as effectively, or they may be exposed to higher levels of wildfire smoke more frequently.¹³

Groups that may be more at risk include:

Older Aged Adults and Seniors: Older adults may face increased health impacts from wildfire smoke exposure due to age-related changes in the immune system and the presence of pre-existing health conditions.¹⁴

Pregnant People, Infants, and Young Children: Exposure to wildfire smoke during pregnancy can affect both the mother and the developing baby, increasing the risk of complications.¹⁵



8 Government of Canada. (Modified 2024, November). *Wildfire smoke, air quality and your health*.

Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/health/healthy-living/environment/air-quality/wildfire-smoke.html>

9 Government of Alberta. *Air indicators: Fine particulate matter*. Retrieved from <https://www.alberta.ca/air-indicators-fine-particulate-matter>

10 Environment and Climate Change Canada. *Health risks of air pollution*. (April 2026).

Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/air-quality-health-index/health-risks.html>

11 Alberta Health Services. (2023, June 16). *Wildfire smoke and your health*.


Retrieved from <https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Alberta/Pages/wildfire-smoke-health.aspx>

12 BC Centre for Disease Control. *Health Effects of Wildfire Smoke*. Retrieved from https://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/Guidelines%20and%20Forms/Guidelines%20and%20Manuals/Health-Environment/BCCDC_WildFire_FactSheet_HealthEffects.pdf

13 Public Health Agency of Canada. (2024, July). *Wildfires in Canada: Toolkit for Public Health Authorities*.

14 Government of Alberta. *Air quality and health*. Retrieved from <https://www.alberta.ca/air-quality-and-health>

15 BC Centre for Disease Control. *Health Effects of Wildfire Smoke*.



Children may be more affected by air pollution due to their developing respiratory systems and higher air intake relative to their body weight. Their increased time spent being active outdoors can also heighten their exposure.

Young children may report stomach aches for respiratory symptoms. Signs to watch for include wheezing, noisy breathing (in or out), fast breathing, struggling to breathe, or head bobbing in infants.¹⁶

People with Pre-existing Conditions: Those with chronic conditions such as asthma, diabetes, cancer, lung or heart conditions, or mental illness may experience worsened symptoms or complications when exposed to wildfire smoke. They should monitor their symptoms and follow their healthcare provider's advice if they worsen. Common symptoms to watch for include:

- *Asthma or Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD):* Increased coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath, or more phlegm.
- *Heart failure:* More shortness of breath or swelling in the ankles and feet.
- *Heart rhythm issues:* Fluttering in the chest or light-headedness.
- *Angina or coronary artery disease:* More chest or arm pain.¹⁷

People Experiencing Homelessness: Wildfire smoke presents a health threat to people experiencing homelessness who may have limited access to clean air, water, medical support, and reliable shelter.

Outdoor Workers, Sports Teams: People who engage in heavy physical activity, like sports or strenuous work outdoors, breathe more deeply and quickly. This increases the amount of pollutants inhaled during wildfire smoke.¹⁸

Extreme heat can compound the health issues associated with poor air quality events. Although air pollution and smoke can be harmful to your health, extreme heat is more dangerous. Whenever safe and possible, keeping cool should always be your priority.¹⁹

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Alberta Capital Airshed – Are You at Risk? Infographic ([English](#), [French](#), [Cree](#))

Alberta's Extreme Heat Webpage - <https://www.alberta.ca/extreme-heat>

Sport Information Resource Centre (SIRC) - *Clearing the Air Around the AQHI*. Accessed May 2026. https://sirc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/AQHI_Infographic_EN.pdf

16 Hussein, A. E., & Hicks, A. (2025). Outdoor and indoor air-quality monitoring recommendations for child-care centers. West Central Airshed Society. Retrieved from https://wcas.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Air-Quality-Daycare-recommendations-2_optimized.pdf

17 Government of Canada. *Health risks of air pollution*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/air-quality-health-index/health-risks.html>

18 Government of Alberta. *Air quality and health*.

19 Government of Canada. *Wildfire smoke and extreme heat*. Accessed May 2026. <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/hc-sc/documents/services/publications/healthy-living/combine-wildfire-smoke-heat/combine-wildfire-smoke-heat.pdf>

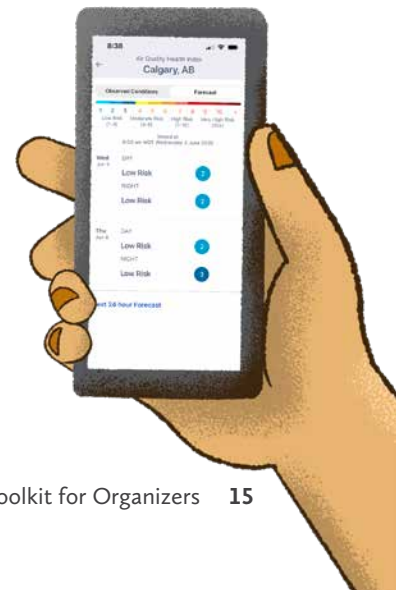
2.5 Understanding the Air Quality Health Index (AQHI)

The Air Quality Health Index (AQHI)²⁰ is a scale that helps people understand how local air quality affects their health. It measures air pollution levels on a scale of 1 (low) to 10+ (very high) and grouped into four health risk groups (low, moderate, high, and very high). It is a health protection tool that is designed to help you make decisions to protect your health by limiting short-term exposure to air pollution and adjusting your activity levels during increased levels of air pollution. The AQHI is calculated using three air pollutants: ground-level ozone (O₃), fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}), and nitrogen dioxide (NO₂). These pollutants are known to have harmful effects on lung and heart health as well as other health impacts. Some provinces/territories may also include additional pollutants in their AQHI calculations.

Health Risk	AQHI	Health Messages	
		At Risk Population	General Population
Low Risk	1 – 3	Enjoy your usual outdoor activities.	Ideal air quality for outdoor activities.
Moderate Risk	4 – 6	Consider reducing or rescheduling strenuous activities outdoors if you are experiencing symptoms.	No need to modify your usual outdoor activities unless you experience symptoms such as coughing and throat irritation.
High Risk	7 – 10	Reduce or reschedule strenuous activities outdoors. Children and the elderly should also take it easy.	Consider reducing or rescheduling strenuous activities outdoors if you experience symptoms such as coughing and throat irritation.
Very High Risk	Above 10	Avoid strenuous activities outdoors. Children and the elderly should also avoid outdoor physical exertion.	Reduce or reschedule strenuous activities outdoors, especially if you experience symptoms such as coughing and throat irritation.

[Health Messages](#) for the AQHI are developed by Health Canada and based on extensive epidemiological research derived from a time-series study that analyzed the relationship between air pollution exposure and health effects in 12 major Canadian cities. The Health Messages and the AQHI program is a collaborative initiative delivered in partnership with Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) and provincial/local health and environmental agencies.

In Canada, the AQHI is exclusively used, but you may come across other scales when viewing international websites and apps. The [WeatherCAN app](#) (or [Weather Information Map](#)) is a Canada-wide resource that shares AQHI information.



²⁰ Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC). *About the Air Quality Health Index* (April 2026). Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/air-quality-health-index/about.html>

ECCC issues **Air Quality Alerts** via the [WeatherCAN app](#) when air pollution is expected to rise or is already high. Alerts are issued for wildfire smoke events and contain specific information about the event, timeline, and include health protective actions and messaging.

Air Quality Alerts are colour-coded (yellow, orange, or red) based on possible risks. The AQHI helps determine when to issue a warning, and what colour to use. Yellow alerts are issued for AQHI 7-10, and Orange alerts are issued when AQHI is 10+ for three or more hours. [Learn more about colour-coded alerts.](#)

ALERT COLOURS

There are 3 types of alert colours and symbols:



Yellow

- ▶ **Hazardous weather may cause damage, disruption, or health impacts**
- ▶ Impacts are moderate, localized and/or short-term
- ▶ Yellow alerts are the most common



Orange

- ▶ **Severe weather is likely to cause significant damage, disruption, or health impacts**
- ▶ Impacts are major, widespread and/or may last a few days
- ▶ Orange alerts are uncommon



Red

- ▶ **Very dangerous and possibly life-threatening weather will cause extreme damage and disruption**
- ▶ Impacts are extensive, widespread, and prolonged
- ▶ Red alerts are rare

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Frequently Asked Questions about AQHI [here](#).

Video: [Canada's weather app: WeatherCAN](#)

Government of Canada – [About the Air Quality Health Index](#)

Government of Alberta – [Air Quality Health Index – Calculation](#); [Alberta AQHI Map](#)

BC Centre for Disease Control –

[BC Health and Smoke Exposure \(HASE\) Coordination Committee Guideline](#)

Alberta Environmental Public Health Information Network (AEPHIN) - interactive visualizations of historical heat warnings and poor air quality events across Alberta: <http://aephin.alberta.ca/heatwarnings>

Alberta's Be Prepared Program - emergency preparedness resources for extreme weather:

<https://www.alberta.ca/know-the-risks>

3 Impacts to Outdoor Festivals and Events

3.1 The Importance of Arts, Culture, and Festivals to Community Wellbeing

Festivals and events hold an important place in a local community and its cultural landscape. They offer displays of art, music, and cultural practices and bolster storytelling, connection, and self expression. They are occasions to steward unity, gathering people together in the celebration of culture and placemaking. Volunteer-driven events offer opportunities for communities and organizations to engage with citizens, develop skill sets, and cultivate teamwork and community. In addition, festivals and events generate notable economic impact in towns and cities through tourism, engaging local suppliers and vendors and driving patrons to local businesses. Whether large or small, festivals and events create opportunities for cross-cultural exchange, collective effervescence, and civic engagement.

3.2 How Wildfire Smoke Affects Festivals

Festival organizers are responsible for the health and safety considerations for attendees, staff, volunteers, and artists. For the purposes of this guide, legal consultants have applied an Alberta-based lens. Organizers should consult applicable local legislation to ensure requirements are accurately understood and applied to their specific event.

WHO IS CAPTURED BY OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY OBLIGATIONS?

s.1 In this Act,

- (f) “contracting employer” means a person, partnership or group of persons who, through a contract, an agreement or ownership, directs the activities of one or more employers involved in work at a work site;
- (k) “employer” means
 - (i) a person who is self-employed in an occupation,
 - (ii) a person who employs or engages one or more workers, including a person who employs or engages workers from a temporary staffing agency,
 - (iii) a person designated by an employer as the employer’s representative, or
 - (iv) a director or officer of a corporation or a person employed by the employer who oversees the occupational health and safety of the workers employed by the corporation or employer;
- (cc) “occupation” means every occupation, employment, business, calling or pursuit over which the Legislature has jurisdiction, except...[remainder of clause not relevant].



Note: perhaps contrary to the norm in legal interpretation where definitions are narrow and obligations are focused and direct, because the aim of Occupational Health and Safety law²¹ is to ensure the health and safety of workers as far as is reasonably practicable, OHS definitions and obligations are broad, purposive and overlapping. As such there is no employer-employee relationship; rather, there are a number of definitions in Occupational Health and Safety law which expand the traditional notion of ‘employer’; ‘occupation’ is one of them. Thus rather than identifying an employee’s employer as ‘the’ employer, Occupational Health and Safety law speaks to ‘an’ employer, i.e., a person who employs someone who is engaged in an occupation on the worksite. (See the discussion of ‘worker’, below.) As such, it is suggested that the organizing body of an outdoor festival — regardless of the nature of its constating documents, i.e., a company, corporation, society, municipality, etc., is likely to be “an employer” at the outdoor festival and therefore should consider these obligations.

WHY IS WILDFIRE SMOKE CAPTURED BY OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY OBLIGATIONS?

- (o) “harmful substance” means a substance that, because of its properties, application or presence, creates or could create a danger, including but not limited to a chemical, biological or radiological hazard, to the health and safety of a worker exposed to it;
- (p) “hazard” means a situation, condition or thing that may be dangerous to health and safety;

Note: the operative mechanism of Occupational Health and Safety law, reflective of the above noted aim, is to identify then eliminate or, if elimination is not possible or practicable, control it by way of engineering, administrative or, lastly, personal protective equipment (PPE) measures. Although smoke is not specifically listed as a hazard in the context of this document, it clearly is captured by the definitions found at section 1(o) and (p) of the OHS Act.

WHOSE HEALTH AND SAFETY MUST BE CONSIDERED?

(tt) “worker” means a person engaged in an occupation, including a person who performs or supplies services for no monetary compensation for an organization or employer, but does not include... [remainder of clause not relevant].

3(1) Every employer shall ensure, as far as it is reasonably practicable for the employer to do so,

- (a) the health, safety and welfare of
 - (i) workers engaged in the work of that employer,
 - (ii) those workers not engaged in the work of that employer but present at the work site at which that work is being carried out, and
 - (iii) other persons at or in the vicinity of the work site whose health and safety may be materially affected by identifiable and controllable hazards originating from the work site

Note: Generally speaking, Occupational Health and Safety law focuses on ‘workers’, a term which included volunteers — “for no monetary compensation”. It is important to note that the health and safety of not only the organizer’s workers (thus volunteers as well) must be ensured, but also workers (and thus volunteers) of other employers on site must also be ensured, e.g., the workers of any vendors on site.

²¹ Section 2 The purposes of this Act are


- (a) the promotion and maintenance of the highest degree of physical, psychological and social well-being of workers,
- (b) to prevent work site incidents, injuries, illnesses and diseases,
- (c) the protection of workers from factors and conditions adverse to their health and safety...

Lastly, a relatively recent addition to Alberta Occupational Health and Safety legislation, the health and safety of relevant non-workers — “other persons at or in the vicinity” of the site — must also be ensured if they would be materially affected by hazards emanating from the site. Of course, in our context, since wildfire smoke would of course not be emanating from the site the application of Occupational Health and Safety legal considerations is questioned. Nevertheless, due to the breadth of the legal considerations at hand, it is suggested that this is truly a distinction without a difference: regardless of whether Occupational Health and Safety applies to audience members, organization responses to wildfire smoke reflective of the presence of workers will no doubt be relevant (subject to possible modification) to audience members.

Despite the clear distinction between attendees (audience members) and workers (staff, volunteers, artists), for the purposes of this section we will discuss health and safety considerations as applicable to all, unless otherwise noted.

The simple reality is that as festivals are outdoors, there are limited opportunities to mitigate the effects of wildfire smoke. The initial approach to hazards — elimination — is clearly not possible. We must then consider the tripartite approach to hazard control should eradication not be possible: engineering, administrative or PPE approaches (in that hierarchical order).

CONTROLS	PURPOSE	OUTDOOR EVENT CONTEXT
Engineering Controls	Elimination or reduction of exposure to hazardous situations or substances before workers are exposed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Limited for outdoor events ▶ Fans on stages ▶ Trailers or indoor spaces with air filters ▶ Adjusting activities scheduling in accordance with the smoke forecast ▶ Working in shorter shifts
Admin Controls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Establish procedures/ protocols ▶ Reduce exposure time ▶ Training ▶ Monitor worker health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Creation and development of policy ▶ Establish decision making triggers ▶ Be aware of supplier/partner policies around firesmoke and their employees (unionized or not) ▶ Ensure training is provided for any PPE and administrative controls ▶ Check in with staff, volunteers and artists on an ongoing basis
PPE	Respiratory protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Providing masks (ideally N95) ▶ Rotating staff, volunteers, artists through indoor spaces or trailers with air filtration systems ▶ Access to free, clean water



Specific guidance, however, is found in an OHS publication specifically addressing outdoor work in the presence of wildfire. The most recent version of the information sheet, “Wildfire Smoke”, updated August 2024,²² outlines the following:

EXPOSURE RISKS

Outdoor workers near to the source and those performing strenuous activities are most exposed; however, workers in any number of jobs may be exposed to wildfire smoke.

While outdoor air may appear smoky, the amount of hazardous substances in the air are typically far below occupational exposure limits (OELs) found in the Alberta Occupational Health and Safety Code (Schedule 1, Table 2).

[Government of Alberta OHS guidelines for employers and workers](#)

[Government of British Columbia OHS](#)

[Government of Manitoba OHS](#)

[Government of Northwest Territories OHS](#)

[Government of Saskatchewan OHS](#)

[Yukon OHS: Worker’s Safety and Compensation Board](#)

- ▶ Understand the Occupational Health and Safety obligations in your region. In your planning cycle, map out the engineering and administrative controls. If providing masks for your volunteers is financially prohibitive, encourage participants to bring their own. Your group may also be eligible to receive Government of Canada surplus through the [GCSurplus program](#), which will donate KN95/N95 masks to your organization.

3.3 Economic and Financial Impacts

Someone is bound to bear the financial impact of an outdoor festival or event being impacted by wildfire smoke.

If the event is not cancelled:

- ▶ Ticket holders may choose not to attend because of unpleasant or unhealthy conditions, losing their investment in tickets already purchased;
- ▶ Organizers risk lower ticket sales, or the loss of on-site sales of merchandise, food and beverage;
- ▶ On-site vendors risk lower sales.

If the event is cancelled:

- ▶ Ticket holders may have no entitlement to refund from the organizer;
- ▶ Organizers may owe guarantees to some, if not all, performers and are likely to lose ticket sales and revenue from on-site sales of merchandise, food and beverage;
- ▶ On-site vendors will likely lose out on income earning for a day or weekend altogether;
- ▶ Organizers may still be contractually obligated to pay full supplier fees.

²² It may be accessed here: <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/e5806cdb-ad57-454e-b89b-761e5286a3da/resource/bf3bcb04-c577-4bc6-9945-456c8dfeacce/download/jet-ohsorp-f007-wildfire-smoke-2024-08.pdf>

3.3.1 Ticketing and refunds

In general there is no legal prescription about who bears the financial risk of event cancellation between the organizer and the ticketholder. Whether the organizer is required to refund a ticket holder in the event of cancellation is a matter for determination under the common law of contracts. At its root, any contract requires an agreement between the parties and the exchange of some form of valuable consideration. For instance, at its simplest a concert organizer and a ticket buyer agree that, in exchange for the buyer paying the ticket price, the organizer will admit the buyer to the venue at the date and time of the concert and there will be a performance by the artist in question.

The performance is expected:

mere admission to the venue without a performance is insufficient as that is not what the buyer paid for. In the absence of specific contract provisions, the law will most likely assume that the advertised performance not happening is a breach of contract by the organizer, entitling the ticket buyer to demand a refund. This was well illustrated in the Ontario court decisions from 1998-1999 around the insolvency of Livent Inc. which included claims for refunds on behalf of ticketholders. The Ontario courts described the contract created by buying a ticket to future show in these terms:

... there was not a contract for the purchase of services, but rather a contract in the nature of a licence to attend a theatre and to occupy a particular seat for a particular performance

... the purchase was complete at the time the ticket was obtained, at which time the ticketholder acquired an enforceable right to attend a future performance or, failing performance, to claim rescission of the contract and repayment of the ticket price.


It is also clear that the contract can include terms under which the ticket buyer gives up their right to demand a refund if the performance does not happen. No such contract term existed in the Livent case.

As the Ontario courts explained:

... if such performance does not take place, there is a total failure of consideration and, subject to any enforceable provision in the contract between Livent and the ticket holder to the contrary, and I have been referred to no such provision, the ticket holder is entitled to rescission of the contract and to the return of the moneys paid for the ticket.

Especially when the ticket is for an outdoor event that is by its nature weather-dependent, the organizer can and likely will stipulate terms and conditions in anticipation that the event may be disrupted, such as: “All sales are final” or “No refunds”. Thus, the contract includes a term by which the buyer bears the financial risk of the event not happening. Organizers may wish to set up the process for online and face-to-face ticket sales so that the buyer must expressly confirm their acknowledgement and agreement that all sales are final at the point of purchase.

In addition to the common law of contracts, each province and territory may have its own consumer protection legislation that sets different requirements, including for ticket refunds, within that jurisdiction. In the Livent case the ticket buyer group invoked a provision in Ontario consumer protection legislation that gave them enhanced refund rights. They were unsuccessful.



Under Alberta consumer protection legislation, when an event ticket is resold through a “secondary seller” on a “secondary ticketing platform, that seller is required to refund the purchaser when the event is cancelled before the ticket can be used.²³ The relevant definitions in the statute are:

- (a) “primary seller” means a person other than a secondary seller who is engaged in the business of making tickets available for sale and includes, as applicable, the owner of the place to which a ticket provides admission, the promoter of the event occurring at that place and any agent of those persons;
- (b) “secondary seller” means a person who is engaged in the business of making available for sale tickets that were originally made available for sale by a primary seller;
- (c) “secondary ticketing platform” means a website, online service, electronic application, print publication or physical location that facilitates the sale of tickets by providing ticket sellers, other than primary sellers, with a method through which to make their tickets available for sale;

This element of consumer protection legislation is only a few years old in Alberta and appears so far not to be tested in court. It is likely that an event organizer selling festival tickets through its own platform (or under a third-party platform like Eventbrite) will be considered a primary seller and not a secondary seller and therefore not caught by these mandatory refund provisions. Modern ticket sales often involve a network of commercial relationships that complicate matters around event cancellation. This is well illustrated by a 2017 decision of the B.C. court arising from the bankruptcy of the Pemberton Music Festival Limited Partnership (PMFLP). The 2017 Pemberton Music Festival never happened because of PMFLP’s bankruptcy. However, several thousand tickets had already been sold through Ticketfly which had a contract with PMFLP to be its exclusive ticket seller. Before PMFLP declared bankruptcy Ticketfly had remitted to PMFLP most of the funds it received on ticket sales. By the time of the court proceedings those funds were in the control of the bankruptcy trustee. Once the cancellation of the festival was announced, many ticket buyers that had paid by credit card got refunded by their credit card companies. Those companies then charged back Ticketfly for the refunds they had paid. Ticketfly’s contract with its own bank (J.P. Morgan Chase Bank and Paymentech LLC) obligated it to pay the chargebacks to the ticket buyers’ credit card companies. The contract between Ticketfly and PMFLP required PMFLP to reimburse Ticketfly for the chargebacks. The contracts between Ticketfly and each ticket buyer did not promise that there would be a refund if the event was cancelled, but provided that there would be a refund if PMFLP instructed it to issue a refund and provided the funds, which PMFLP did not do because of its bankruptcy.

The result in the PMFLP case is relevant to bankruptcy law but not relevant to the present discussion. Its facts, however, show that there are many moving parts in modern online ticket sales that make it difficult to generalize about who bears responsibility for ticket refunds if an outdoor event is cancelled because of wildfire smoke. An event organizer should be particularly attentive to communicating its refund policies to ticket buyers and knowing the terms and conditions of any online ticket selling platform it uses. For example, as of February 2026 Eventbrite’s Terms of Service and Merchant Agreement incorporate a detailed statement of Refund Policy Requirements and Eventbrite’s Cancelled Event Policy which requires the organizer to issue refunds for cancelled events. Thus using Eventbrite as your organization’s third party ticket platform may be incompatible with maintaining and enforcing a policy that “All ticket sales are final.”

²³ Consumer Protection Act, RSA 2000, c C-26.3, Part 8.1 Ticket Sales Regulation, Alta Reg 78/2018.

- ▶ Understand how the contract with your ticketing provider may impact your organization's refund policy.

Another consideration, many festivals rely significantly on ticket sales as a source of revenue; the disruption of income posed by a cancellation and associated refunds can also impact the ability to pay contracted suppliers. Suppliers, whether audio/visual, porta-potty, tent rentals, fencing etc. have a vested interest in festivals and events being financially resilient and activating again when conditions improve or the following year. When discussing terms and conditions of supplier contracts be clear on the following at the time of signing and be aware while negotiating deposits;

- ▶ What is the window for cancellation of your supplier contract without penalty in the event of a force majeure?
- ▶ If the worst were to happen, ask your suppliers if they would consider reducing your amount owed?
- ▶ Is there an option to spread out payments on the amount owed to offer cash flow reprieve?

Supplier relationships are like any, the more they are stewarded the greater the opportunity to come up with a solution where both parties can move forward.

3.4 Social and Reputational Risks

Oftentimes music festivals are well-staffed in terms of communications and social media needs. That said, from an evidentiary point of view, consideration should be given to use of social media outlining protective steps in the event of wildfire smoke conditions which might constitute evidence that the festival was sufficiently diligent – demonstrated due diligence – to address the hazard of wildfire smoke. While, of course, due diligence to abide by OHS requirements is essentially the only defence to charges under that legislation, it is suggested that sharing information with respect to smoke conditions and protective measures at the site can only serve to heighten the view of the organization in the minds of the public. (This is particularly the case in the context being discussed, given that the hazard of wildfire smoke will obviously be generally known to the local population, and so the use of social media and publish the publicizing of efforts to address it – akin to a “PSA” can only be seen to be responsible.)

- ▶ Should your organization be faced with a wildfire smoke event it is important that you are demonstrating due-diligence through communicating with your stakeholders.

Consider deploying:

- ▶ A newsletter update
- ▶ Social media messaging
- ▶ A holding statement on your website

If/when the smoke dissipates and the messages can be taken down, ensure you archive your social media posts, take screenshots and/or otherwise keep records of your efforts to demonstrate your diligence should you be required to in the future.



4 Accessing and Interpreting Air Quality Data

4.1 Trusted Sources for Real-Time Air Quality Information

Across Canada the AQHI is exclusively used, but you may come across other scales when viewing international websites and apps. The [WeatherCAN app](#) is the official app from ECCC, and is a trusted source of AQHI in Canada. You can also connect to the Weather Network for AQHI and Air Quality Alerts.

4.1.1 Government of Canada

The Federal Government publishes the official AQHI values, health messages, and 24-48 hour forecasts for major communities. The federal source is best for official health guidance, risk levels (Low, Moderate, High, Very High), and future air quality predictions.

Canada-wide AQHI is accessible through [WeatherCAN app](#) and online via:

Text Bulletins: https://weather.gc.ca/airquality/aq_bulletins_e.html?Bulletin=flcn25.cwwg

Scale displays: https://weather.gc.ca/airquality/pages/index_e.html

24hr forecasting: https://weather.gc.ca/airquality/pages/nextHourlies/abaq-002_e.html

4.1.2 Provincial/Territorial sources and displays

Provincial sites provide transparency and the fastest possible access to data streams, which is especially useful during rapidly developing events like wildfires. However, the federal site is the official authority for determining the *health risk* based on verified data and consistent methodologies across the country.

BC: <https://www.env.gov.bc.ca/epd/bcairquality/readings/find-stations-map.html> real-time, specific data from local monitoring stations across the province.

AB: <https://airquality.alberta.ca/map> for real-time, specific data from local monitoring stations across the province and community AQHI. [Alberta Airsheds Council](#) includes membership from all 10 Airsheds in Alberta. Airsheds are community-based, multi-stakeholder organizations that monitor air quality and report independent air quality data in the Province. ([What is an Airshed?](#))

SK: <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/7431e790acad443bb618bafe817416ca> real-time raw air quality data from specific monitoring stations

SK: <https://sesaa.ca/>, <https://wyamz.ca/> and <https://www.gpaz.org/home/index.php> real-time raw air quality data collected by air zone associations. Saskatchewan's three Air Zone Associations are regionally based, multi-stakeholder organizations that monitor air quality and report independent air quality data in Saskatchewan.

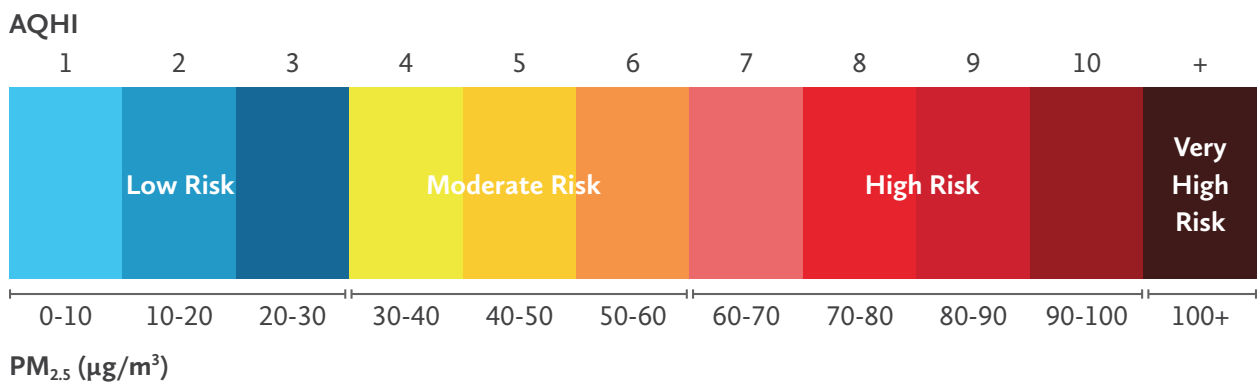
MB: <https://www.manitobaairquality.ca> real-time raw air quality data from specific monitoring stations.

NWT: <http://aqm.enr.gov.nt.ca>

YT: [Find out about wildfire smoke | Yukon.ca](#) (for information) [AQmap](#) real-time raw air quality data from the territory's purple air monitoring network

4.1.3 Community-based monitoring (UNBC AQMap, PurpleAir)

Community-based monitoring sources and data from low-cost sensor networks often driven by “citizen science” can be used to supplement real-time air quality for smaller communities or within urban areas, at the neighbourhood level. Both federal and provincial air quality jurisdictions deploy microsensors to monitor PM_{2.5} to fill gaps in monitoring networks. During wildfire smoke events, PM_{2.5} becomes the most relevant pollutant and data collected from microsensors can be associated with the AQHI colour scale to indicate level of health risk.²⁴



The [UNBC Air Quality \(AQ\) Map](#) displays air quality data from microsensors, continuous monitoring stations (referenced here as Agency/FEM stations), and the AQ Eggs across Canada.

You can find AQHI+ data collected through microsensors displayed in the Canadian context on the [PurpleAir map](#) by selecting the “Canadian PM_{2.5} (AQHI+)” layer on the data display (as shown below).

4.2 Other Monitoring and Forecasting Tools

[Colour-coded weather alerts](#) for air quality warnings are issued by ECCC and available through:

- ▶ The [WeatherCAN mobile app](#)
- ▶ Federal [Weather Information Map](#)

[Public Safety Canada](#) provides emergency preparedness guidance for severe weather.

Other weather apps will display AQHI (*note the source of the air quality data – for example, the WeatherNetwork app displays AQHI information sourced from the Government of Canada. To ensure consistent communications, use Canadian AQHI sources, language, colour scales, and health messages*).

²⁴ BC Health and Smoke Exposure (HASE) Coordination Committee Guideline (July 2025). Retrieved from <https://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/Guidelines%20and%20Forms/Guidelines%20and%20Manuals/Health-Environment/BC%20Health%20Wildfire%20Smoke%20Response%20Coordination%20Guideline.pdf>



Event organizers can register online for **digital notifications** for wildfire and extreme weather events across multiple jurisdictions. Some examples include:

Alert Ready

Federal emergency alert system includes alerts related to wildfire events (wireless providers are required to distribute alerts on all compatible wireless devices connected to an LTE or 5G network)

<https://www.alertready.ca>

Voyant Alert!

<https://ca.voyent-alert.com/vras/client.html#!/registration>

Alberta Emergency Alert

<https://www.alberta.ca/alberta-emergency-alert.aspx>

Alberta Air Quality Notification Protocol: What you need to know

<https://open.alberta.ca/publications/alberta-air-quality-notification-protocol-what-you-need-to-know>

Saskatchewan Public Alert System

<https://emergencyalert.saskatchewan.ca/#/>

Manitoba Alert Ready System

<https://mbready.manitoba.ca>

NWT Alert

<https://www.maca.gov.nt.ca/en/services/nwt-alert>

Yukon

<https://alertable.ca/#/>

Canada Public Weather Alerts


https://weather.gc.ca/airquality/aq_bulletins_e.html?Bulletin=f1cn25.cwwg

Active Air Quality Health Advisories

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/news/air.aspx>

Municipal alert systems may be available. Local news sites and social media channels often provide real-time updates and alerts.

[BlueSky Canada](#) is a [wildfire smoke forecasting](#) system. It aims to help Canadians adapt to increased wildfires on the landscape due to climate change. BlueSky Canada intends to respond to the rapidly changing nature of wildfire smoke. Wildfire smoke concentrations can vary significantly over short distances and periods of time. This may not be well-characterized by the existing air quality monitoring network or responded to in a timely manner by Wildfire Smoke Advisories.



The Government of Canada also publishes a [Wildfire Smoke Fine Particulate Matter \(PM_{2.5}\) - 72 hour forecast](#) for different geographies across the country, including the [Pacific](#) and [Prairies](#) regions. All Air Quality Forecast Maps can be found here: [Air Quality Model Forecast Maps - Environment Canada](#). For more info about the Regional Air Quality Deterministic Prediction System: [Air quality and weather - Canada.ca](#).

The following **provincial displays** provide an overall look at the current wildfire situation across the federal and provincial jurisdictions and include links to fire advisories and other wildfire resources:

[Canadian Wildland Fire Information System](#)

[Natural Resources Canada Interactive Map](#)

[BC Wildfire Service Map, BC Wildfire Dashboard](#)

[Alberta Wildfire Status Dashboard, Alberta Wildfire](#)

[Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency](#)

[Government of Manitoba Wildfire Service Daily Situation Reports](#)

[Manitoba Wildfire Service Fire Maps](#)

[NWT Wildfire Update](#)

[Yukon Wildfires](#)

Agroclimate data can be used to track departures from average precipitation, current seasonal moisture anomalies, and other related indicators. While not directly wildfire-specific, [maps of current agroclimate conditions](#) may be useful tools for early awareness and planning metrics.

4.3 How to Apply Air Data: Situational Reporting During Events

Following is an example of an Air Quality Situational Report (AQSitRep) that was prepared for an outdoor event in Alberta in 2025. Key components are numbered and described in the following table. It is important for organizers to cross reference data and not rely on a single source. While we compare PM_{2.5} levels from microsensors and wildfire smoke forecasts to AQHI colours and risk levels, it is important to note that these are not true AQHI values (because they only consider PM_{2.5} and not the other pollutants included in the official AQHI calculations (as described in [Section 2.5: Understanding AQHI](#)). This report format encourages users to compare data from multiple sources to avoid misinterpretation.



Air Quality Situation Report

Edmonton Folk Music Festival

August 08, 2025



12

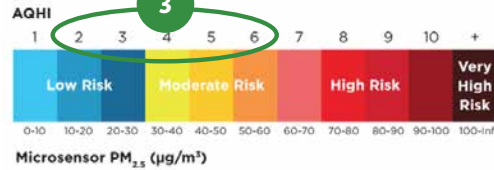
Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) – Edmonton

2 Current Air Quality

Friday August 08, 2025 at 07:00

2 (Low Risk)

Forecast	Fri, Aug 08, 2025 daytime	4 (moderate risk)
	Fri, Aug 08, 2025 evening	6 (moderate risk)
	Sat, Aug 09, 2025 daytime	4 (moderate risk)
	Sat, Aug 09, 2025 evening	3 (low risk)



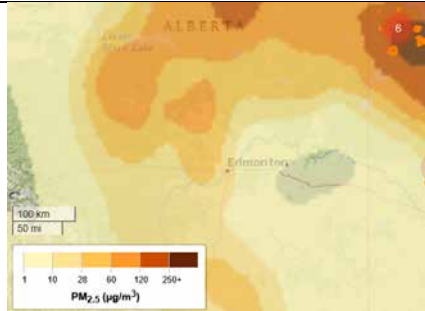
4 AQHI Health Message

Health Risk	AQHI	At Risk Population	General Population
Low Risk	1 to 3	Enjoy your usual outdoor activities.	Ideal air quality for outdoor activities.
Moderate Risk	4 to 6	Consider reducing or rescheduling strenuous activities outdoors if you are experiencing symptoms.	No need to modify your usual outdoor activities unless you experience symptoms such as coughing and throat irritation.

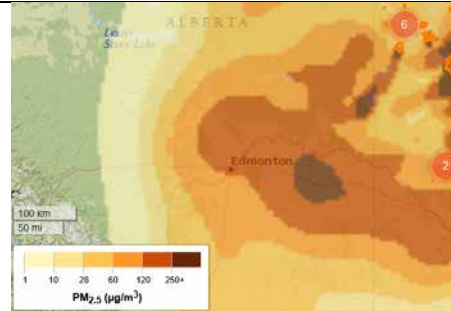
5 Wildfire Smoke (<https://firesmoke.ca/forecasts/current/>)

- Smoke from the northern fires has pushed back into the region causing elevated AQHI (moderate risk)
- Projected smoke forecasts show an increase in AQHI to a level of 6 (moderate risk) late Friday (Aug 08), then dropping back to a forecast of 3 (low risk) for Saturday evening (Aug 09)
- Particulate readings in the region are currently less than 25 µg/m³ (low AQHI risk levels)
- Longer range forecasts continue to show smoke from northern Saskatchewan bending westward and hitting the region under a higher concentration, before tapering lower again

6 August 08, 2025, 10:00



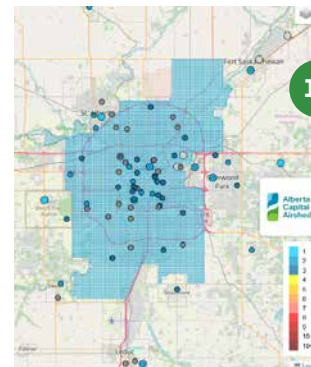
August 08, 2025, 22:00



7 AQHI - <https://capitalairshed.ca/>

There are three stations reporting AQHI within Edmonton, showing Friday to be in AQHI levels of 4 to 6 (moderate risk), then on Saturday evening forecasts of 3

Community	Current AQHI	Low Risk	Moderate Risk	High Risk	Very High
Edmonton	4	+	+	+	+
Strathcona County	3	+	+	+	+
St. Albert	3	+	+	+	+
Enoch	3	+	+	+	+
Leduc	3	+	+	+	+



8 Local Monitoring

Stations are reporting PM_{2.5} at low risk (<30 µg/m³) this morning. Forecasts show a moderate risk throughout today then dropping back to low risk into tomorrow. <https://capitalairshed.ca/live-air-data-map/>

9 Additional Resources

- [Health warnings – Air Quality Events](#)
- [Weather Alerts - Alberta](#)

For more information, please call/text Gary Redmond, ACA Executive Director at 780.935.4279

10



DESCRIPTION	LINKS/RESOURCES
1 Event Details: Clearly state the festival/outdoor event and the date of the SitRep.	
2 Community AQHI: If available, list the current Community AQHI, the forecasted values for the dates and times retrieved, and associated risk level (low, moderate, high, very high) as available for your region.	For major cities, by province: WeatherCAN app Local Air Quality Health Index
3 AQHI Colour Scale: Identify visually along the AQHI colour scale the range of AQHI values to anticipate over the period of time of the forecast.	
4 Health Canada AQHI Health Message: List the AQHI Health Messages that correspond to each AQHI value identified for the current and forecasted values, along with the “At Risk” and “General Population” health messaging.	Understanding Air Quality Health Index messages - Canada.ca WeatherCAN app
5 Wildfire Smoke Forecasts: Refer to wildfire smoke animated models to anticipate how firesmoke is expected to move through your region; include bullet points that describe the movement over the period of the forecast.	See Section 4.2 Other Monitoring and Forecasting Tools Smoke Forecast - FireSmoke.ca Wildfire Smoke Fine Particulate Matter PM_{2.5} - 72h Hourly Maps at Ground Level - 12 UTC - Prairies - Environment Canada
6 Visual References: Include screen captures that depict forecasted periods with timestamps when wildfire smoke may become an issue or where communications may be required by event organizers.	
7 AQHI: Determine if there are stations that produce individual AQHI values that contribute to the overall community AQHI value (#2). In larger urban centres like Calgary, Alberta, there are several AQHI stations that collectively contribute to one community AQHI value, but that individually may reflect more local conditions in the region.	WeatherCAN app Local Air Quality Health Index
8 Other Local Monitoring: Consider other monitoring data that is relevant, including microsensors, other monitoring technologies, and site monitoring (if applicable).	Alberta Airsheds – Alberta Capital Airshed (for example) UNBC AQ Map PurpleAir Map
9 Additional Resources: Include links to other important resources that will be relevant to decision-makers and those responsible for monitoring air quality for the event.	Examples might include: Event AQHI-based Response Plan
10 Key Contacts: Include contact information for air quality supports to support interpretation and decision making for the event.	
11 Innovative mapping alternatives	Custom data feeds, innovative mapping, and air quality supports for events across Western Canada are available through collaborative partnerships with ACA.
12 QR Code	

5 Risk Mitigation and Preparedness

5.1 Risk Assessment for Festival Organizers

The correct starting point for any discussion on risk assessment and mitigation is the Occupational Health and Safety legislation generally and, in the context of wildfire smoke, the aforementioned Information Sheet [referenced in [Section 3.2 of this guidebook](#)].

HAZARD ASSESSMENT AND CONTROL

As per Part 2 of the Alberta Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Code, employers must identify hazards in the workplace and implement controls, following the hierarchy of controls set out in [Section 9](#).²⁵

Eliminating or preventing wildfire smoke exposure is the best way to protect health. When employers cannot eliminate wildfire smoke, they must assess the hazard, evaluate the hazard controls available and put together a plan for how they will control potential worker exposure using the hierarchy of controls.

- ▶ Identify workers at increased risk of exposure.
- ▶ Outline the signs and symptoms of exposure to smoke.
- ▶ Explain the hazards to workers.


This 4-point approach can be applied as follows:

Involve workers in planning: although this is a legal requirement, in the actual circumstances of festival workers being very temporary (most workers are at the worksite for less than a week) and likely are engaged in work that they do not usually do (for example, the two lawyers writing this portion of the document are volunteer workers), there is limited planning of a Wildfire Smoke Plan which can involve workers. However, there is clear worker representation — even the two lawyers count — and so this requirement is minimally but actually satisfied. As a further prophylactic measure, it is suggested that a review by workers representing various types of work (different types of volunteers, artists, paid staff) review any documentation prior to its publication.

Identify workers at increased risk of exposure: As outlined above, given the nature of outdoor festivals, all workers should be considered at risk. However, given that exposure increases the risk of harm, it should be assumed that workers who have greater exposure — work longer outdoor/unventilated shifts — bear increased risk.

Outline the signs and symptoms of exposure to smoke: This is discussed elsewhere in this document [[Section 2.4](#)].

²⁵ As discussed above, this hierarchy is the elimination of the hazard and if not practicable or possible, control by engineering controls, and if not, administrative controls, and lastly, by PPE.




Explain the hazards to workers: It is assumed that this document will be reduced to a more concise ‘Action Plan’ document; an even more concise document should be provided to workers (volunteer, paid staff, vendors) and also to have something even more concise for artists. It is therefore suggested that a Revised Schedule be prepared to stagger shifts, i.e., rather than 8-hour shifts, regular shifts of 4 hours (or other maximum duration as identified by medical personnel; see elsewhere in this document) be organized and explained to workers. Further, subject to the discussion of types of masks elsewhere in this document, workers should be instructed to bring (or be provided with) masks.

5.2 Contractual Risk Management

Written contracts of many kinds include provisions for how the parties deal with the unanticipated disruptions that frustrate performance, usually called a force majeure clause. Common to all force majeure clauses is the idea of excusing the parties’ non-performance of the contracted obligation because of some happening outside the control of the parties. Here, such a clause is appropriate not only in the contracts festivals sign with artists, but also with suppliers and onsite merchants. A typical force majeure clause consists of two main elements: (1) the description of what happens if there is a force majeure event, and (2) a definition of what constitutes force majeure. The usual purpose of force majeure is to clarify that neither party is at fault for not performing their part of the bargain and so the first element typically involves contract wording that the parties’ respective obligations hereunder will be excused fully, without any additional obligation, or that neither party will be held liable for non-fulfillment of the terms of this agreement. However, because of their bargaining power, a headlining artist’s contract may obligate the organizer to pay the headliner’s full guaranteed fee notwithstanding a force majeure event, so long as the artist is ready and willing to perform. A governmental order that prohibits the event proceeding is commonly within the express definition of force majeure.

For example, force majeure may be defined to include any act, order, rule, or regulation of any court, government agency, or public authority. Thus, if wildfire results in an actual evacuation order or public health directive under which the event cannot legally proceed as scheduled, this would be force majeure under most properly drafted clauses.

In addition to identifying with precision what is or is not within the definition of force majeure, certain general catch-all terminology is traditional in such clauses, including “act of God”, and any other causes not within the reasonable control of either party. However, given the importance of outdoor conditions for summer festivals in Canada, it is insufficient to rely on this vague terminology. Your agreements should have clear express provision if the intention is to treat wildfire smoke as force majeure. This may not have been necessary 20 years ago, but the climate has changed and brought with it the expectation that each summer is likely to see disruptions to normal summer activities from wildfire smoke. An express provision for inclement weather is common in definitions of force majeure. Whether or not wildfire smoke constitutes weather, however, is unclear. Wildfires themselves are influenced by weather; made worse by hot weather and strong winds, made less severe by cool weather and rain. Wind, heat and rain are all part of the weather, and wind in particular plays a role in bringing smoke from the wildfire locale that may be hundreds of kilometres away to your festival grounds. But the smoke itself might not count as weather (as opposed to a consequence of a natural or human-caused disaster). We may be at the point where organizers want to be even clearer and address wildfire smoke by name by, for example, expressly stating that force majeure includes inclement weather which in turn includes some level of wildfire smoke. In fact, since festival attendees are accustomed to enduring, and are expected to endure, quite a bit of inclement weather without event cancellation (hailstorms and thunderstorms in southern Alberta for example), the unique



qualities of wildfire smoke as a health hazard that is beyond a mere unpleasant inconvenience that dampens the festival spirit warrants giving it specific treatment in force majeure clauses.

Precisely what happens in the event of cancellation due to inclement weather or wildfire smoke is a matter that ought to be clearly stated in the contract.

For a contract with an onsite merchant, the organizer most likely wants to ensure that the merchant is operating onsite for the entire time period contracted for (such as all opening hours of the festival) unless and until the organizer decides that the event must be cancelled or suspended due to excessive wildfire smoke. Thus the organizer wants to retain a degree of discretion to make decisions to shut down the event, without those decisions resulting in liability to the merchant. A sample contract term we were shown states:

The Festival makes no guarantees regarding the attendance of the event. While the Festival shall run rain or shine, if the event or any part of it is prevented by means not in the control of the Festival, for instance, the declaration of any public authority, strike, delay in transportation, or any other cause, the Vendor agrees that all obligations in this Agreement shall be waived and not be enforced. Further, the Vendor agrees that it shall have no claim or cause of action against the Festival for any damages, costs, or losses whatsoever.


It may be open to dispute whether this clause would apply except when smoke conditions are severe enough that the event is shut down by a public health order, something undeniably outside of the control of the organizer and the merchant. But if the organizer hopes to retain the discretion to stop the festival based on its own judgment that wildfire smoke is dangerously unhealthy when there is no public health order, it might consider an alternate provision that:

The Festival makes no guarantees regarding the attendance of the event. While the Festival's intention is that it shall run rain or shine, if

- (i) the event or any part of it is prevented by means not in the control of the Festival, for instance, the declaration of any public authority, strike, delay in transportation, or any other cause, or*
- (ii) in the sole discretion of the Festival, to be exercised reasonably, severe weather (including wildfire smoke) makes it necessary to cancel or suspend the event or any part of it, the Vendor agrees that all obligations in this Agreement shall be waived and not be enforced for the period of time of the cancellation or suspension. Further, the Vendor agrees that it shall have no claim or cause of action against the Festival for any damages, costs, or losses whatsoever.*

ARTIST CONTRACTS

The artist contracts can be the greatest challenge. The organizer has likely developed its own form of artist contract that addresses force majeure according to the organizer's preference. This may involve paying the artist a guaranteed amount so long as the artist was ready and willing to play, reimbursing the artist for their expenses but not their performance fee, or not paying the artist at all. The sample artist contract term that we were shown provides that in the event of a force majeure event "the parties' respective obligations hereunder will be excused fully, without any additional obligation, and each of the parties shall bear its own costs incurred in connection with the Agreement." Because this is an outdoor event, the artist contract also includes an overriding clause to deal specifically with inclement weather and high risk smoke levels:



Notwithstanding anything to the contrary stated herein, in the event a performance is scheduled at an outdoor venue, Artist's performance shall proceed regardless of inclement weather conditions (including fire and high risk smoke levels) and artist shall be paid the full guarantee should FFSC elect to cancel the performance, provided Artist is ready, in the city of performance and able to perform. In the event that weather conditions become severe enough to create any threat to public safety and/or individuals present at the performance, based on the determination of local public authorities, then such conditions shall be deemed a Force Majeure event.

The drafter of this provision has deftly addressed three situations:

1. Smoke levels are high risk but the event goes ahead: the artist will be paid to perform.
2. Smoke levels are high risk and the organizer exercises its discretion to cancel the performance: the artist will be paid if ready and able to perform.
3. Smoke levels are high risk such that public authorities determine that there is a threat to public safety at the event: the force majeure provision applies and each party bears its own costs.

The organizer's form of artist contract will frequently be rejected by headlining artists whose agents or production companies have developed their own contract forms, that will typically provide that the artist gets paid no matter what and that inclement weather is not a force majeure event. The organizer may sign the form only after inserting certain of their own wording that directly contradicts the artist's original wording and intention, including specific wildfire and/or wildfire smoke issues being considered a force majeure event. We cannot anticipate what would happen when the time comes to attempt to interpret the contract and reconcile the contradictory provisions, except to say that the artist and organizer would likely end up on the road to a legal battle.

5.3 Performer Considerations

As discussed throughout this legal review, artists may be considered as workers for all relevant purposes of safety considerations. That said, it would be practically if not legally necessary to consider the uniqueness of artists' attendance at outdoor festivals in the context of communication. Specifically, although it may be the case that a particular artist is in attendance for a large part or even the entirety of the duration of the festival, it might also be the case that a particular artist (and in particular headliners) might simply arrive for part of it. This might result in a need to ensure that communication of the hazard and steps to address it (see above) be provided on a basis reflective of each artist's schedule. Further, given that artists might be accustomed to relying on others to assist them in being where they should be or knowing what they should know about any particular venue on their touring schedule, repeated communication is appropriate and suggested. Further still, reflective of touring realities, particular attention should be paid to ensuring that such communication is made to tour managers, etc. who might be or feel 'responsible' for their artists.

5.4 Public Education and Consistent Messaging

As wildfire smoke becomes an ongoing risk factor in festival season, it is important for the industry to begin speaking with shared language. Organizations are encouraged to align their internal and external communications with the language and resources used in this guide, particularly where possible with Canadian standards such as the AQHI. Using consistent terminology helps staff, volunteers, and audiences interpret air quality information more easily and make informed personal health decisions.

For example, referencing the AQHI (Canada’s system) rather than the Air Quality Index (AQI, used in the United States) helps avoid confusion and ensures messaging is grounded in a shared national framework.

5.5 Site Design and Operations

It is important to acknowledge that designing a fully smoke-free environment is not achievable outdoors; site design and mitigation measures aim to reduce, not eliminate, exposure.

Accessibility: Planning

- ▶ Prioritize access to Cleaner Air Spaces for seniors, pregnant individuals, children, and those with respiratory issues.
- ▶ Ensure Cleaner Air Spaces are physically accessible.
- ▶ Deploy accessible communication (signs, announcements, etc).
- ▶ Ensure volunteers, security, staff, and on-site first aid personnel know how to assist an individual in need.

Cleaner Air Spaces/Cooling Tents: Planning

- ▶ Designate Cleaner Air Spaces where patrons, staff, and volunteers can reduce exposure for a set period.
- ▶ Predetermine on-site tents and trailers that can be enclosed; sealed and set up with air filters and fans.
- ▶ Provide seating in these spaces.

Site Operations: Response

- ▶ Increase access to free drinking water.
- ▶ Provide misting fans throughout the site.
- ▶ Adjust activities and schedule, cancel, or modify strenuous outdoor activities.
- ▶ Provide an area for artists with air filters, lozenges, fans, and if needed oxygen canisters and appropriate supplies.
- ▶ Water down dusty areas, this helps to prevent additional dust entering the air, reducing the amount of unsettled dust.
- ▶ Consider requiring risk mitigation supplies and PPE in advance, i.e., filtration, masks, sealing tape, etc.

Shelter-in-place: Response

- ▶ Recommend limited movement and remain in designated areas.
- ▶ Pause programming to assist with reduced activity and crowd movement.
- ▶ Actively direct patrons to Cleaner Air Spaces, especially demographics at high risk.

Mask and Filtration Supplies: Response

- ▶ Supply N95/KN95 masks to volunteers, artists, and staff.
- ▶ Have masks available to patrons at certain on-site locations (information, medical, Cleaner Air Spaces, accessibility, box office), prioritize vulnerable persons.
- ▶ Deploy portable air filtration units in Cleaner Air Spaces, trailers, artist greenrooms, and enclosed public spaces, including tents.





5.6 Insurance Supports

This section addresses some of the ways in which your organization may be able to offset the negative impacts of wildfire smoke on the festival, particularly through products that are available on the Canadian insurance market.

DECISION-MAKING, DUTY OF CARE, AND LIABILITY EXPOSURE

From an insurance and risk standpoint, there is no single AQHI number that automatically determines when an event must be cancelled. Instead, liability is assessed based on whether the organization and its leadership exercised **reasonable due diligence** given the circumstances and information available at the time.

This includes:


- ▶ Monitoring credible air quality data and public health advisories.
- ▶ Considering Occupational Health & Safety obligations to workers (staff, volunteers, artists, and contractors).
- ▶ Implementing reasonable mitigation measures (administrative controls, PPE, reduced exposure, communications).
- ▶ Documenting how and why decisions were made.

Cancelling at a lower AQHI level (often in the 6–7 range) may be entirely reasonable where exposure is prolonged, vulnerable populations are present, conditions are worsening, or mitigation options are limited. Conversely, not cancelling at an AQHI of 4–5 is not, on its own, negligent if reasonable controls are in place.

From a Directors & Officers (D&O) insurance standpoint, personal liability claims against board members or senior staff would typically only arise where there is an allegation of a wrongful act, such as a failure to act prudently or a disregard for known risks. Acting in good faith, within a documented framework, and aligned with health and safety guidance materially reduces both organizational and personal exposure.

EVENT CANCELLATION INSURANCE

A number of insurance underwriters operating in Canada offer insurance policies that cover event cancellation. There is no standardized wording to these policies. In general they provide financial compensation when the policyholder suffers losses because of having to cancel a specified event. While event cancellation insurance is an existing insurance product, it is not clear whether a policy will respond if the losses arise without an evacuation order as the triggering event. Insurance coverage is determined by the specific wording found in an insurance policy, not just the mere title of the policy. Thus, even if it is called a policy of Event Cancellation Insurance, whether it provides coverage depends on what the policy says and what the triggering event is. If the Policy requires an actual threat of wildfire, or a government order to evacuate or remain indoors as the event that triggers coverage, there will be no coverage if the wildfire is hundreds of kilometres away and the smoke that reaches the event is unhealthy but has not triggered any governmental order.



Event organizers in Canada will want to get the advice of an independent insurance broker about what insurance policies are available on the market to insure against risks of event cancellation due to wildfire smoke. Insurance brokers are professionals whose advice about what coverage is available and what coverage is actually provided by the insurance policies the client pays for is held to a strict standard of professionalism and reliability. Important considerations when talking to your organization's insurance broker about event cancellation insurance:

- ▶ *Confirm that your insurance broker has experience with event cancellation insurance and is able to handle the request.*
- ▶ *Be clear in explaining the risks that you anticipate and want to be covered for. If your concern is losing revenue or having to cancel because of wildfire smoke, make sure to spell that out. The client is the one who best understands their risks and it will be helpful to make the broker aware of your concerns that you are hoping to have coverage for.*
- ▶ *Ask the broker to explain how coverage works, what is a triggering event, whether unhealthy wildfire smoke is sufficient, or whether coverage requires a government shutdown order or similar triggering event.*
- ▶ *Ask the broker to explain how the contract benefit works. Does the Policy cover lost revenue or sunk costs (like performance contract) or both?*
- ▶ *Consider the premium and what the broker explains about coverage and make an informed decision about whether your organization can afford event cancellation insurance.*

Event cancellation insurance is also available to the touring artists that you engage to perform. The major headlining artists in particular may secure this type of insurance in the normal course. The smallest artists may simply be priced out of the market. Artists in the middle range might need encouragement to insure against event cancellation. One way to achieve security that a cancellation due to wildfire smoke will not lead to a payment dispute from the artist may be to negotiate a provision in the artist contract that the artist will have event cancellation insurance in place and on request will provide proof of insurance to the organizer. For the artist this provides the benefit of insurance, and the opportunity to negotiate so that their fee includes at least part of the cost of their insurance premium. For the organizer it provides a degree of security that it will not face a payment claim from the artist in the event the event must be cancelled. A touring artist may not be able to get their entire tour or show income insured. The artist and organizer can negotiate so that the organizer guarantees a certain percentage in the event of cancellation, the artist can insure the remainder (or partly insure and assume the risk for the remainder).

- ▶ Event cancellation insurance has become increasingly difficult to obtain for outdoor events where air quality and wildfire smoke are recognized risks. Insurers rely on policies that respond to sudden, unforeseen events, whereas smoke impacts are now widely acknowledged as a recurring and forecastable exposure during Western Canadian summers. The framework highlights that wildfire smoke events can last hours or days, vary significantly by location, and are often preceded by forecasts, AQHI advisories, and public health guidance. From an underwriting perspective, this predictability undermines the “fortuity” required for coverage, leading many insurers to impose broad exclusions for smoke, air quality, pollution, or health-related impacts, or to treat these conditions as known circumstances rather than insurable perils. Even in markets willing to consider limited smoke-related extensions, coverage is often narrowly defined and difficult to trigger, creating significant uncertainty for event organizers.

EVENT CANCELLATION INSURANCE – MARKET REALITIES

Event Cancellation Insurance is designed specifically to address financial losses arising from cancelled or curtailed events. However, in the context of wildfire smoke, meaningful coverage is increasingly limited.

Key challenges include:

- ▶ Many policies exclude smoke, air quality, pollution, or health-related hazards outright.
 - ▶ Where coverage exists, policies often require a formal government evacuation or prohibition to trigger coverage.
 - ▶ Some markets require extremely high thresholds (often AQHI 10+) before coverage responds.
- ▶ In practice, this means an organization may make the correct, health-based decision to cancel well before insurance triggers are met—resulting in little or no insurance recovery. Where coverage is offered, a further challenge arises from the misalignment between insurance triggers and responsible health and safety practices. Some markets that extend coverage for smoke-related cancellation require air quality to reach a “very high” health threshold—often an AQHI of 10+—before coverage responds. In practice, however, festival organizers may be compelled to cancel or significantly modify events at much lower AQHI levels (typically in the 6–7 range) to protect the health and safety of performers, workers, volunteers, and at-risk attendees, and to comply with occupational health and safety obligations. This creates a structural coverage gap: cancellations made at prudent, health-based thresholds may be viewed by insurers as voluntary risk management decisions rather than insured losses, thereby negating coverage. The growing frequency of these scenarios, combined with the potential for correlated losses across regions, continues to suppress insurer appetite and highlights a broader sector gap that cannot be resolved through traditional event cancellation insurance alone without policy innovation, public backstops, or subsidy mechanisms.

Practically speaking: Events typically have thresholds well below the formal evacuation order; the issue is that many force majeure clauses trigger rather late. You see this with wildfire evacuations, where many people depart long before the order comes down. Therefore, practical decision-making must be performed ahead of formal directives for event operations leads.

Evacuation orders are issued by municipal/provincial authorities, and air quality health statements are put out by Alberta Health Services (or your provincial health authority), along with Environment and Climate Change Canada.

- ▶ This disconnect between responsible risk management and insurance response is an important reality for boards, management, and funders to understand.

BUSINESS INTERRUPTION INSURANCE

In Canada business interruption insurance is typically sold as an adjunct to commercial property insurance. If the organization has a property policy on its office premises, storage location or equipment, this insurance policy may also provide coverage for business interruption that arises from a peril that the property policy covers. If the property policy provides all risks insurance, as is typical in Canada, the possibility exists that an interruption of the income earning festival or event from wildfire smoke may be covered. Again, reviewing the specific terms of coverage is key and the organizer is advised to discuss the scope of business interruption coverage with their insurance broker prior to the renewal of coverage each year. Any organization that obtains this type of insurance is recommended to confer annually with its insurance broker about any significant changes to the coverage terms or the cost of insurance.



BUSINESS INTERRUPTION INSURANCE VS. EVENT CANCELLATION INSURANCE (KEY DIFFERENCES)

Although these coverages are often referenced together, they serve very different purposes and respond to fundamentally different types of loss.

Event Cancellation Insurance

This is a specialty policy intended specifically for events. It may respond to lost revenue or unrecoverable expenses if an event is cancelled or curtailed due to an insured cause. Coverage depends entirely on policy wording and generally does **not** require physical damage. In the context of wildfire smoke, coverage is often limited, narrowly defined, or unavailable unless a formal government order prevents the event from proceeding.

BUSINESS INTERRUPTION INSURANCE

Business interruption coverage is typically an extension of a commercial property policy and is designed to replace lost income resulting from **direct physical loss or damage** to insured property. For outdoor festivals, this coverage is rarely applicable because:

- ▶ Smoke and poor air quality do not constitute physical damage under most policies.
- ▶ Lost income from cancelling an event without property damage will not trigger coverage.
- ▶ Pollution and contamination exclusions commonly apply.

In practical terms, **business interruption insurance almost never responds to wildfire smoke-related event cancellations**, whereas event cancellation insurance may respond only in very limited and highly specific circumstances.

The key takeaway is that festivals should plan on the assumption that **insurance may not respond**, even where cancellation is the correct decision from a health and safety standpoint.

LIABILITY INSURANCE

Most organizations have different forms of liability insurance that provide coverage for the organization's liability to other parties. In short, liability insurance pays damages or settlements when the organization is sued in the specific instances described in the insurance policy.

The most common form of liability insurance is commercial general liability (CGL) insurance. Typical CGL insurance policies will provide coverage when the insured organization is sued for accidentally causing bodily injury to someone or damage to someone else's property. CGL insurance is unlikely to provide any support for event cancellation, which usually involves financial losses without property damage or bodily injury.

For example, if a class of customers sues for the value of a festival ticket after the event was cancelled, it is doubtful that CGL insurance would cover this. If, however, the event is not cancelled, an attendee or volunteer could conceivably sue, alleging that they sustained bodily injury from smoke inhalation at the event for which the organization is liable because it negligently failed to cancel the event. Regardless of whether or not this claim would have merit, it is the type of claim the organization ought to report to its CGL insurer to request a legal defence and coverage.



CGL insurance policies will typically exclude some pollution related claims. Whether or not a particular policy's pollution exclusion would apply to injury caused by exposure to wildfire smoke is an open question.

A second common type of liability insurance is Directors and Officers (D&O) liability insurance. This type of liability insurance provides broad and varied coverage for the liability of the organization's directors and officers, and frequently the organization itself, for claims of wrongful acts. Claims of property damage and bodily injury are typically not included in D&O insurance. Purely contractual disputes arising under performer contracts, vendor contracts, or under event tickets because of event cancellation may or may not be covered.

LIABILITY INSURANCE IF THE EVENT PROCEEDS

If the festival proceeds and an attendee, volunteer, or worker alleges bodily injury due to smoke exposure, that type of allegation would typically be tendered under the organization's **Commercial General Liability (CGL)** policy.

While pollution exclusions exist and may ultimately be tested, insurers will often still have a duty to defend where negligence and bodily injury are alleged. **Early notification to the broker and insurer is critical**, even where the merits of a claim are uncertain. D&O insurance may also respond where allegations relate to governance or decision-making rather than bodily injury itself.

NEGLIGENCE CLAIMS AND THE STANDARD OF THE REASONABLE EVENT ORGANIZER

In the event that your event proceeds in the face of wildfire smoke risk and is not cancelled, a participant may sue the organization claiming that they were injured from inhaling smoke-laden air at the event. Such a lawsuit would be framed in negligence, alleging, for example, that the organizer's negligent failure to cancel the event caused the plaintiff's injury. (For this discussion let's assume that there is no government shut-down of outdoor events). A plaintiff making such a claim would likely have difficulty proving a causal link between their injury and attending the event (as the same injury might have happened even without attending the event). However, the most useful aspect of the claim to discuss for the purposes of this guidebook is the part you can control: your conduct as the defendant event organizer.

Faced with such a claim the courts measure the conduct of the defendant against a reasonableness standard, asking in this case if the event organizer acted reasonably in, for example, deciding to proceed with the event. Given the relative novelty of this type of situation (we are aware of no established Canadian case law that deals with liability for exposing an injured plaintiff to wildfire smoke) there is no clear standard for what type of conduct constitutes organizer reasonableness. This fact would inform the court's assessment of the organizer's conduct; this is new territory for all event organizers.

In analogous circumstances courts look to whether the defendant had taken any steps to anticipate the possibility of the hazard that arose. If the evidence shows that the defendant had nothing in place to respond to a foreseeable risk, it is far more likely to be found to be negligent. For example, a shopping mall owner knows that it risks an injury claim if a customer slips in an icy parking lot and is injured. For that reason (and simply because it is a responsible owner) the mall owner has in place a written policy that the parking lot should be cleared of snow promptly after a snowstorm, and instructs and pays a snow-clearing contractor to implement that policy. There is no expectation that the owner is strictly liable for every slip and fall on the parking lot. By establishing that (i) it had a snow clearing policy in place, (ii) that its policy was sensible and appropriate (e.g., it accounted for the type and frequency of snow in the area), and (iii) that it followed the policy in the particular instance, the mall owner can rebut any inference that it acted unreasonably or negligently and thus avoid liability.

Similarly, an event organizer can take steps that will minimize the chance of it being found negligent for causing a wildfire smoke injury:

- ▶ Develop a written policy based on sound science and other relevant considerations to address management of wildfire smoke risks. This policy will of course be useful in staging the event. It will also be crucial evidence in the event of a negligence claim. The content of this guidebook can help inform the preparation of that policy.
- ▶ Adhere to the policy in planning and executing the event.
- ▶ Maintain records that will be helpful to establish that the steps taken were consistent with the policy. Lawsuits can take years and memories fade over time. Good record keeping can be crucial to rebutting an inference of negligence.

▶ When writing your policy:

- ▶ Keep the language clear and simple.
- ▶ Define the purpose of the policy.
- ▶ Design to reduce/manage risk— this is where your response plan comes in.
- ▶ Ensure your policy can be easily accessed— actively send out your policy and action plan to staff and key volunteers.
- ▶ Review your policy and action plan regularly—document the date of review.



6 Responding to a Wildfire Smoke Event

6.1 Specialized Preparation Guidelines for Outdoor Event Organizers

Organizers are encouraged to develop a staged response to wildfire smoke and poor air quality events based on AQHI values and forecasts. The [AQHI-Based Response Plan Template](#) includes a column to document site-specific responses, considering communication strategies, program modifications, and participant safety.

Organizers of outdoor events, including concerts, festivals, and cultural activities, should monitor real-time air quality data and remain flexible with event plans. When air quality deteriorates, adjustments may be needed to protect participants, volunteers, and staff.

The following suggestions are based on recommendations from **Government of Canada's** [Wildfire smoke, air quality and your health: Protecting your physical and mental health](#).

Outdoor event and activity organizers should:

- ▶ Assess local conditions using the forecasted AQHI, air quality alerts, and weather forecast information and continue to do so during the event or activity to monitor changing conditions²⁶
- ▶ Consider the level and type of activity involved, as well as the needs of participants and spectators
- ▶ Create an **AQHI-Based Response Plan** to determine actions, and how you will monitor environmental conditions.
 - ▷ Example: Modify activity based on air quality,
 - AQHI 4-6 (moderate): Be mindful that at-risk individuals may experience symptoms such as coughing, difficulty breathing, and eye irritation.
 - AQHI 7-10 (high): Reduce event length or intensity, particularly for physically demanding activities.
 - AQHI 10+ (very high): Consider postponing or cancelling events if air quality conditions are hazardous.

Participants and spectators in outdoor events and activities, especially those who are most likely to be impacted by wildfire smoke, should:

- ▶ Pay attention to air quality information.
- ▶ Monitor symptoms and modify or limit outdoor activities as necessary.

The type of activity, the level of exertion required, and the age and relative health of all participants should be factors in deciding whether to hold, continue, or modify an event.

²⁶ Government of Canada. *How weather conditions affect air quality*. (April 2026).
<https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/air-quality-health-index/weather.html#a3>

6.2 Smoke Action Communication Plan

Event organizers should document and share how air quality information will be monitored and communicated **before, during, and in response to smoke events**, including clear roles, channels, and messaging. Below are suggested considerations in developing a Smoke Action Communication Plan for your festival.

MONITORING AND INFORMATION SOURCES

- ▶ Identify how air quality information will be monitored (e.g., AQHI forecasts, public alerts, microsensors).
- ▶ Assign responsibility to a specific staff role for monitoring conditions and triggering communications.
- ▶ Establish review frequency (e.g., daily pre-event, hourly during the event if conditions are variable).

COMMUNICATION TRIGGERS AND THRESHOLDS

- ▶ Complete the AQHI-based Response Plan template to document AQHI thresholds or smoke conditions that will trigger communications.
- ▶ Align each AQHI-based trigger with **clear guidance** (e.g., increased messaging, activity modifications, cancellation considerations).

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION PATHWAYS

Staff and Volunteers

- ▶ Pre-event briefing on smoke protocols and messaging expectations.
- ▶ Day-of updates via staff huddles, text groups, radios, or internal apps.
- ▶ Clear escalation pathway for health or safety concerns observed on-site.

Artists, Performers and Vendors

- ▶ Advance notice outlining how smoke conditions will be communicated and managed.
- ▶ Day-of updates through designated liaisons or group messaging.
- ▶ Clear point of contact for accommodation or schedule adjustments.

PUBLIC AND PARTICIPANT COMMUNICATIONS

Before the Festival

- ▶ Share anticipated air quality considerations through the event website, ticketing pages, and pre-event emails.
- ▶ Encourage attendees to plan ahead, especially those at higher risk.
- ▶ If indoor spaces are available that could be used as cleaner air spaces, have a plan to communicate locations to selected groups.

During the Festival

- ▶ Provide real-time updates through on-site signage, stage announcements (where appropriate), and digital channels.
- ▶ Post current AQHI values and plain-language guidance (e.g., “reduce exertion,” “take breaks,” “consider leaving early”).

During an Air Quality Event

- ▶ Clearly communicate what is happening, what actions are being taken, and what attendees can do to protect themselves. Avoid technical language; focus on practical guidance and reassurance.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL CHANNELS

- ▶ Identify platforms to be used (e.g., Instagram, X, Facebook, event app).
- ▶ Prepare pre-approved message templates for AQHI advisories and smoke events.
- ▶ Use consistent hashtags and pin critical updates for visibility.
- ▶ Link to authoritative air quality sources for those seeking more detail.

FUNDER AND PARTNER COMMUNICATIONS

- ▶ Identify when and how funders, sponsors, or partners will be notified of significant air quality impacts.
- ▶ Maintain consistency between public-facing messaging and partner communications.

ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION

- ▶ Ensure messages are clear, concise, and accessible (plain language, readable signage, multiple formats where possible).
- ▶ Consider how information will reach people without smartphones or social media access.


ENCOURAGE SELF-MONITORING AND PERSONAL DECISION-MAKING

- ▶ Remind attendees, staff, and volunteers to watch for symptoms and adjust activity as needed.
- ▶ Reinforce that individuals are best placed to make personal health decisions based on their circumstances.

6.3 Supporting Attendee and Worker Health

It will be assumed that a wildfire smoke event to such a degree that merits or requires evacuation will result in those outcomes. However, in cases short of evacuation or cancellation, festivals find themselves in the interesting position of communicating what will likely have already been communicated to the general public by provincial/territorial authorities. That is, should the hazard reach a serious risk of public endangerment, typically that provincial/territorial authorities will have already communicated risk assessments and warnings. If that is the case, the most convenient approach is for festivals to point to and repeat those provincial/territorial warnings, citing the source. As discussed elsewhere in this document, availability of cleaner air spaces, while desirable, is likely not to be sufficiently available so as to constitute an effective mitigation strategy for workers (as discussed, including artists, vendors, staff and volunteers) and thus obviously attendees (the audience).





With respect to personal protective equipment (PPE), owing to the public's unfortunate experience with masking born of the Covid pandemic, the notion of masking to prevent airborne contaminant is well established. Further, since the general public might either still have masks or can readily obtain them, it is suggested that should provincial authorities declare a health hazard from wildfire smoke to be at a sufficiently high level that communicating the general risk to the public by the festival is required, a message that recommends the use of face masks can be broadcast on social media and otherwise. Indeed, it might be appropriate for festivals to pre-purchase masks at least for the use of workers so that the requirement to properly equip workers is met and also to better ensure the operation of the festival.

To the extent that hydration is called for, it would be recommended that festivals seek out the assistance of their respective municipalities to arrange for water (trucks, portable drinking fountains, etc.). Indeed, given that hydration would be of assistance for wildfire smoke events, extreme heat event or otherwise, this is generally recommended.

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

It will be suggested that although occupational health and safety legislation may require employers to look after the psychological health of workers, there are few requirements or frankly even mentions in at least the Alberta legislation²⁷. Indeed, beyond referring to psychological injury or harm that is or is likely caused by a person's actual or threatened violence²⁸, the only specific reference to mental health is the requirement for such an assessment prior to patient/client/resident handling activities.

The general statement regarding psychological well being is found in the Purposes section of the Occupational Health and Safety Act:

2 The purposes of this Act are

- (a) the promotion and maintenance of the highest degree of physical, psychological and social well-being of workers...

With such a sweeping purpose such as the (a) promotion and (b) maintenance of (c) the highest degree of psychological well-being, one would expect more direction. Unfortunately, none is found in the Act or the detailed OHS Code. Further, while there is guidance provided in an Alberta publication on psychosocial hazards in the workplace, it offers little relevant information beyond considering such hazards as including "traumatic events at work"²⁹.

Thus for the purposes of this discussion, actual exposure or the threat of it to wildfire smoke should be considered a psychosocial hazard, one captured by the goal of promoting and maintaining psychological well-being of workers to the highest degree, as s.2(a) of the OHS Act puts it.

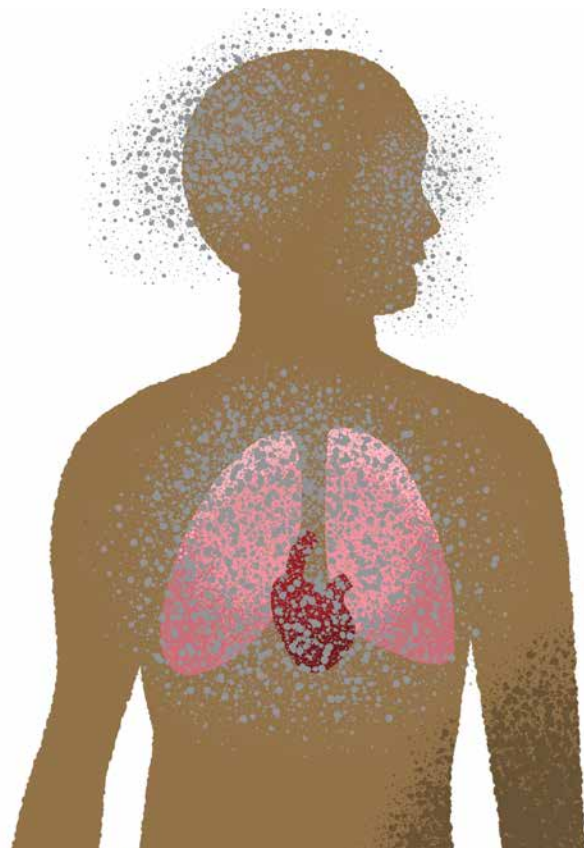
²⁷ It is advised that employers look into the legislation in their region.

²⁸ Alberta Occupational Health and Safety Act, s.1(rr).

²⁹ Please see: <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/preventing-psychological-hazards-in-the-workplace-hazard-assessment>

What does this mean in law and in practice? Firstly, the focus here would be on psychological/psychosocial effects of actual or threatened exposure to wildfire at the workplace, i.e., the festival. (As discussed at the outset, it is suggested that narrowing this type of psychological harm to actual or threatened exposure at the work site is likely impossible, that it is unlikely that this harm would emanate from exposure while at the work site (the festival) only as opposed to generally, particularly giving the ubiquity of wildfire smoke when it engulfs a geographic location.) Nevertheless, in order for festivals to demonstrate due diligence with respect to this psychological hazard, it is suggested that all of the prophylactic measures discussed above (from engineering and administrative controls to PPE to appropriate and oft-repeated communication) be maintained so as to minimize psychological distress.

Further, because of the ubiquitousness of the harm of wildfire smoke and the bespoke nature of psychological reactions, it is suggested that supervisors be trained and reminded of how individual workers might react to hazards such as wildfire smoke. Indeed, because (arguably) of the feelings of helplessness and fear of loss of property or life which arise when a worker's home location is threatened by wildfires (think Fort McMurray, Yellowknife, California), heightened sensitivity, anxiety or even fear might become evident. It is therefore recommended that at least as part of an organization's due diligence in this regard that coordinators/supervisors/managers or others in leadership be trained to an appropriate degree on signs of psychological distress, how to address it reflective of the short time the workers will be at the worksite, i.e., volunteering for mere days. Lastly and realistically, because of the difficulty if not impossibility of a coordinator or supervisor at an outdoor festival, having only a few days' (at most) responsibility to manage the workplace and assess the source of such distress, the most likely result of a determination of psychological distress would be to relieve the worker of their volunteer duties, not as a termination or ejection from the festival but rather as an accommodation.





7 Financial Resilience and Sector Stability

7.1 Financial Risk Modelling and Minimizing Financial Impacts

Organizations who are in a healthy financial position are more elastic to withstand a wildfire smoke event. Understanding the financial risk is unique to each organization, however there are key actions that can help your organization plan for a worst case scenario and adjust for hopefully a better outcome.

- ▶ Know your sales patterns; take a look at the last three to five years of your festival's sales patterns. If 30% of your sales happen the week leading up to your event, a wildfire smoke event could be just as damaging a few days before your event as it would be during the event itself. This helps understand your risk window.
- ▶ Ensure your ticket refund policies are clear to purchasers; even if you have a “no refund” policy, in some instances, audience members may be able to apply for a charge back with their credit card company. Review [Section 3.3: Financial and Economic Impacts](#).
- ▶ If your organization does decide to offer refunds, offer patrons an opportunity to donate the amount of their refund back to the festival, partially or in full. Be clear and honest in your messaging just how detrimental the wildfire smoke event has had on your organization.
- ▶ In your planning cycle, consider building out several budget exercises;
 - ▷ Create scenarios with 30% and 50% loss of revenues. What expenses can be negotiated if need be?
 - ▷ Create a daily budget scenario for each day of your festival to understand your risks of cancelling. Again, what expenses can be negotiated? Do you minimize your risk of resuming activity if conditions improve later in the day?

Financial sustainability is bolstered by having financial reserves and revenue diversification strategies that can be activated and developed year round. In the event of a financially destabilizing wildfire smoke occurrence, talk to your municipal, provincial, and federal funders, see if they can provide emergency resources to help stabilize your organization. Consider a donor campaign to build resilience. Your community is invested in your organization returning to programming future events. Be transparent about the situation and communicate clearly how donor funds will be spent.



7.2 Long-Term Sector Preparedness and Advocacy

This document serves as an initial framework for a base level understanding of the problem, risk planning, and mitigation. It is intended to support festival organizers with the information needed to advocate with funders at all levels of government and to enable conversations with municipal councillors, Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), and Members of Parliament (MPs). As the conversation continues it will require more coordinated advocacy; for the time being, the focus is on highlighting best practices and establishing guidance on organizational policy and procedures. As the information in this guidebook is implemented and suggested best practices evolve, this document will be reissued with the most up to date information and case studies as they become available. This is just the beginning of an ongoing conversation amongst outdoor festivals and all levels of government.

8 Toolkit and Templates

8.1 AQHI-Based Response Plan Templates

This template helps organizations create a staged response plan based on the AQHI. It includes standardized health messages for both at-risk and general populations.

Complete the final column of the AQHI-Based Response Plan Template with site-specific responses, considering communication strategies, facility adjustments (e.g., *Clean Air Spaces*), program modifications, and participant safety. Refer to the information in [Section 6.1: Specialized Preparation Guidelines for Outdoor Event Organizers](#) to customize your own action plans.

Two versions of the template are provided. The second breaks out the High-Risk Category into each step level. More detailed response levels may be necessary for some organizations to ensure clearer guidance and a more tailored set of precautions during high-risk air-quality events.

EXAMPLE RESPONSES

Low Risk (1–3)

- ▶ Monitor local media.
- ▶ Regularly check the AQHI and AHS Health Advisories.

Moderate Risk (4–6)

- ▶ Monitor local media.
- ▶ Regularly check the AQHI and AHS Health Advisories.
- ▶ Monitor symptoms.
- ▶ At-risk individuals should reduce strenuous activity.
- ▶ Prepare to adjust outdoor activities.
- ▶ Communicate with the public that the organization is monitoring the situation and will update as more information becomes available.
- ▶ Update your insurance provider that there is a risk developing (depending on the forecast).

High Risk (7–10)

- ▶ Monitor local media.
- ▶ Regularly check the AQHI and AHS Health Advisories.
- ▶ Monitor symptoms.
- ▶ Communicate advisories as needed.
- ▶ Shorten or cancel outdoor activities.
- ▶ Activate onsite facility plans to maintain indoor air quality (if available).
- ▶ Update your insurance provider that there is a risk developing (depending on the forecast).



Very High Risk (10+)

- ▶ Monitor local media.
- ▶ Regularly check the AQHI and AHS Health Advisories.
- ▶ Monitor symptoms.
- ▶ Communicate advisories as needed.
- ▶ Cancel outdoor activities.
- ▶ Activate your refund communications plan to ticket holders.
- ▶ Consider cancelling outdoor events that do not involve activity.
- ▶ Activate facility plans to maintain indoor air quality.
- ▶ If AQHI is projected to remain high for a prolonged time, consider evacuation of at-risk populations to indoor locations with clean air.
- ▶ Update your insurance provider that there is a risk developing (depending on the forecast).

AQHI	Health Messages – At-Risk Population	Health Messages – General Population	Wildfire Smoke Response
Low Risk (1–3)	Enjoy your usual outdoor activities.	Ideal air quality for outdoor activities.	
Moderate Risk (4–6)	Consider reducing or rescheduling strenuous activities outdoors if you are experiencing symptoms.	No need to modify usual outdoor activities unless symptoms occur.	
High Risk (7–10)	Reduce or reschedule strenuous activities outdoors. Children and the elderly should also take it easy.	Consider reducing or rescheduling strenuous activities outdoors if symptoms occur.	
Very High Risk (10+)	Avoid strenuous activities outdoors. Children and the elderly should also avoid outdoor physical exertion.	Reduce or reschedule strenuous activities outdoors, especially if experiencing symptoms.	

V1 Adapted from Government of Alberta – [About the Air Quality Health Index](#)




AQHI	Health Messages – At-Risk Population	Health Messages – General Population	Wildfire Smoke Response
Low Risk (1–3)	Enjoy your usual outdoor activities.	Ideal air quality for outdoor activities.	
Moderate Risk (4–6)	Consider reducing or rescheduling strenuous activities outdoors if you are experiencing symptoms.	No need to modify usual outdoor activities unless symptoms occur.	
High Risk (7)	Reduce or reschedule strenuous activities outdoors. Children and the elderly should also take it easy.	Consider reducing or rescheduling strenuous activities outdoors if symptoms occur.	
High Risk (8)	Reduce or reschedule strenuous activities outdoors. Children and the elderly should also take it easy.	Consider reducing or rescheduling strenuous activities outdoors if symptoms occur.	
High Risk (9)	Reduce or reschedule strenuous activities outdoors. Children and the elderly should also take it easy.	Consider reducing or rescheduling strenuous activities outdoors if symptoms occur.	
High Risk (10)	Reduce or reschedule strenuous activities outdoors. Children and the elderly should also take it easy.	Consider reducing or rescheduling strenuous activities outdoors if symptoms occur.	
Very High Risk (10+)	Avoid strenuous activities outdoors. Children and the elderly should also avoid outdoor physical exertion.	Reduce or reschedule strenuous activities outdoors, especially if experiencing symptoms.	

V2 Adapted from Government of Alberta – [About the Air Quality Health Index](#)




8.2 Air Quality Situation Report Template



Air Quality Situation Report

Edmonton Folk Music Festival
August 08, 2025

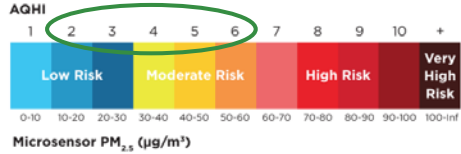


Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) – Edmonton

Current Air Quality
Friday August 08, 2025 at 07:00 **2 (Low Risk)**

Forecast

Fri, Aug 08, 2025 daytime	4 (moderate risk)
Fri, Aug 08, 2025 evening	6 (moderate risk)
Sat, Aug 09, 2025 daytime	4 (moderate risk)
Sat, Aug 09, 2025 evening	3 (low risk)



Microsensor PM_{2.5} (µg/m³)

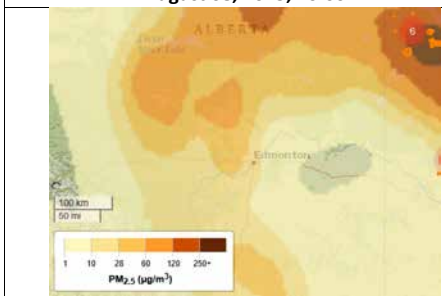
AQHI Health Message

Health Risk	AQHI	At Risk Population	General Population
Low Risk	1 to 3	Enjoy your usual outdoor activities.	Ideal air quality for outdoor activities.
Moderate Risk	4 to 6	Consider reducing or rescheduling strenuous activities outdoors if you are experiencing symptoms.	No need to modify your usual outdoor activities unless you experience symptoms such as coughing and throat irritation.

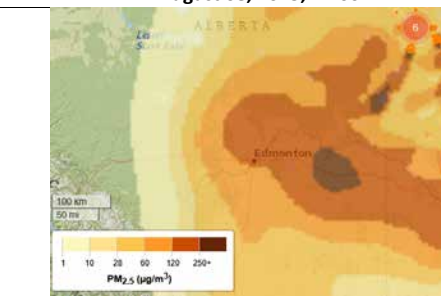
Wildfire Smoke (<https://firesmoke.ca/forecasts/current/>)

- Smoke from the northern fires has pushed back into the region causing elevated AQHI (moderate risk)
- Projected smoke forecasts show an increase in AQHI to a level of 6 (moderate risk) late Friday (Aug 08), then dropping back to a forecast of 3 (low risk) for Saturday evening (Aug 09)
- Particulate readings in the region are currently less than 25 µg/m³ (low AQHI risk levels)
- Longer range forecasts continue to show smoke from northern Saskatchewan bending westward and hitting the region under a higher concentration, before tapering lower again

August 08, 2025, 10:00



August 08, 2025, 22:00



AQHI - <https://capitalairshed.ca/>

There are three stations reporting AQHI within Edmonton, showing Friday to be in AQHI levels of 4 to 6 (moderate risk), then on Saturday evening forecasts of 3

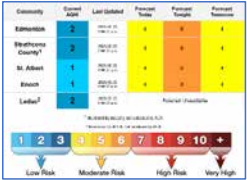
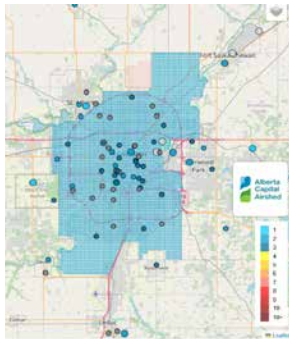
Local Monitoring

Stations are reporting PM_{2.5} at **low risk** (<30 µg/m³) this morning. Forecasts show a moderate risk throughout today then dropping back to low risk into tomorrow. <https://capitalairshed.ca/live-air-data-map/>

Additional Resources

[Health warnings – Air Quality Events](#)

[Weather Alerts - Alberta](#)

For more information, please call/text Gary Redmond, ACA Executive Director at 780.935.4279

8.3 Smoke Action Plan Infographic for Outdoor Events



Smoke Action Plan Outdoor Events

The increased presence of wildfire smoke and poor outdoor air quality during summer months can impact outdoor events. Organizers of outdoor events should monitor real-time air quality data and remain flexible with event plans. When air quality deteriorates, adjustments may be needed to protect participants, volunteers, and staff.



1 Check air quality conditions before and during outdoor activities and have a plan

- Download the free [WeatherCAN app](#) for your local AQHI and air quality forecasts.
- View ACA's [Live Air Data Map](#) for real-time air quality data at [capitalairshed.ca](#).
- Create an AQHI-based response plan for different air quality levels.

2 Modify, reschedule, or cancel events depending on air quality levels

- **AQHI 4-6:** Be mindful that at-risk individuals may experience symptoms.
- **AQHI 7-10:** Reduce event length or intensity, particularly for physically demanding activities, and consider rescheduling events.
- **AQHI 10+:** Consider rescheduling or cancelling events when air quality conditions are hazardous.

3 Take precautions during events

- Communicate air quality updates to participants, volunteers, and staff, ensuring they can take appropriate actions.
- Have trained first aid responders in attendance, and consider hiring standby event paramedics depending on the size and type of event.



Email info@capitalairshed.ca for help building an AQHI-based response plan and other information to support your outdoor event.



8.4 AQHI Health Messages Infographic

English, French and Cree language versions are available.

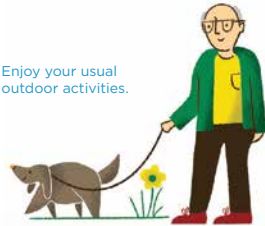


Are You at Risk?

Children, older adults, pregnant women, people with lung or heart conditions, and those with weakened immune systems may be more vulnerable to poor air quality.

AT-RISK POPULATION

Enjoy your usual outdoor activities.



Consider reducing or rescheduling strenuous activities outdoors if you are experiencing symptoms.

Reduce or reschedule strenuous activities outdoors.



Avoid activities outdoors and stay inside when possible. Consider use of an N95 mask if outdoors.

AQHI

1 - 3

4 - 6

7 - 10

10+

GENERAL POPULATION

Ideal air quality for outdoor activities.



No need to modify your usual outdoor activities unless you experience symptoms such as coughing and throat irritation.



Consider reducing or rescheduling strenuous activities outdoors if you experience symptoms such as coughing and throat irritation.



Avoid strenuous activities outdoors and stay inside when possible.

Visit our website for air quality data and free learning materials and resources. capitalairshed.ca



8.5 Sample Public Communications and Social Media Messaging

In advance of your event, ensure that you have your messaging ready to go. If you have screens on-site to display messaging, ensure that your social media messaging mirrors what you have up on your screens. In addition the same wording can be used as a script to make announcements from stages.

When displaying screen messages to a large outdoor crowd, ensure you are maximizing readability at a distance, in varying light, and under stress.

When designing messaging, festivals should take into consideration the following:

1. High visibility, maximize contrast, and colour combinations:

- a. White text, on a black background
 - i. Works both in day and evening light
 - ii. High contrast
 - iii. Does not imply urgent action required, but is seen as an industry standard for messaging
- b. Black text, on a yellow background
 - i. Works both in day and evening light
 - ii. High contrast
 - iii. Grabs attention
 - iv. Urgent but controlled messaging
- c. White text on red background
 - i. Works both in day and evening light
 - ii. High contrast
 - iii. Grabs attention
 - iv. Association with an emergency
 - v. Used for critical alerts only, should not be overused

2. Colour Meaning, training attendees

- a. **Black** = General information
- b. **Yellow** = Attention/Show Pause
- c. **Red** = Emergency/Immediate action required

3. Simplicity

- a. Two colours max
- b. Standard font, nothing decorative
- c. No design elements, stay focused

4. Text and Fonts

- a. Clean typefaces, sans-serif fonts
- b. ALL CAPS for short urgent messages
- c. Limited text, messaging should be clear and to the point
- d. In emergency incidents, people do not read paragraphs



AIR QUALITY UPDATE

WE ARE MONITORING THE
AIR QUALITY HEALTH INDEX
(AQHI)

Adjust activities according to the health recommendations for AQHI

Follow our social media for updates and future important information.

AIR QUALITY UPDATE

WE ARE MONITORING THE
AIR QUALITY HEALTH INDEX

Adjust activities according to the health recommendations for AQHI

Follow our social media for updates and future important information.



SHOW PAUSED

**WE ARE MONITORING THE
AIR QUALITY HEALTH INDEX**

Adjust activities according to the health recommendations for AQHI

Follow our social media for updates and future important information.

EVACUATION ALERT SEVERE SMOKE

**CALMLY MOVE TO THE NEAREST EXIT AND
SEEK SHELTER OUTSIDE OF THE FESTIVAL.**

Follow our social media for updates and future important information.

STAGE ANNOUNCEMENTS - TEMPLATES

1. General Awareness (Moderate Conditions)

“Hey folks, just a quick heads-up—today’s air quality is a bit lower than usual due to regional smoke. Most people can continue to enjoy the festival as planned, but listen to your body and monitor symptoms. Consider taking it easy, staying hydrated, and checking in with yourself throughout the day. You’ll find shaded rest areas and quieter spaces around the site if you need a break.”

2. Encouraging Use of Cleaner Air Spaces

“Friendly reminder that we’ve got designated **Cleaner Air Spaces** available on site if you’d like a break from the smoke. These areas are marked around the grounds. If you’re feeling the effects of the air, we encourage you to take a pause, rest up, and take care of yourself.”

3. Mask Availability Announcement

▶ If your event is able to provide masks for patrons

“We’ve also made protective masks available at our info and medical tents. If you’d like one, or if you’re feeling sensitive to the smoke, please don’t hesitate to grab one—our team is happy to help.”

4. Advisory for Sensitive Groups (Higher AQHI)

“As air quality conditions have changed, we want to remind folks—especially children, seniors, and anyone with respiratory or heart conditions—to take extra care today. Please consider spending time in our Cleaner Air Spaces, reducing physical activity, and reaching out to our medical team if you’re not feeling well.”

5. Reduced Activity Messaging

“We’re currently seeing higher smoke levels on site. We’re asking everyone to help reduce exposure by limiting movement around the festival and taking breaks when you can. Please make use of our Cleaner Air Spaces and shaded areas, and check in on the people around you.”

6. Program Adjustment Announcement (if needed)

“We’ve made a few adjustments to today’s schedule in response to air quality conditions. Some sets may be shortened or delayed as we prioritize the safety of our artists, crew, and all of you. Please keep an eye on the screens and listen for updates from the stage.”

7. Closing / Reassurance Tone

“We’re continuing to monitor conditions closely throughout the day and will keep you updated. Thanks for your patience, your care for one another, and for helping keep this festival safe and welcoming for everyone.”

Tips:

- ▶ Keep tone **calm, grounded, and non-alarmist**
- ▶ Repeat key info every **30–60 minutes** if conditions persist
- ▶ Pair announcements with **screens + signage** for clarity
- ▶ Utilize AQHI numbers, colours, and associated health messaging as needed

9 Sources and Further Reading

9.1 At-Risk Groups and Special Considerations

1. Public Health Agency of Canada. (2024, July). *Wildfires in Canada: Toolkit for Public Health Authorities*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/wildfires-canada-toolkit-public-health-authorities.html>
2. Government of Alberta. *Air quality and health*. Retrieved from <https://www.alberta.ca/air-quality-and-health>
3. BC Centre for Disease Control. (2019). *Health Effects of Wildfire Smoke*. Retrieved from http://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/Guidelines%20and%20Forms/Guidelines%20and%20Manuals/Health-Environment/BCCDC_WildFire_FactSheet_HealthEffects.pdf
4. Alberta Capital Airshed. (2024). *Outdoor and indoor air-quality monitoring recommendations for child-care centers*. Retrieved from <https://capitalairshed.ca/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/Air-quality-monitoring-recommendations-for-child-care-centers-and-schools.pdf>
5. Government of Canada. *Health risks of air pollution*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/air-quality-health-index/health-risks.html>
6. Government of Saskatchewan. Health Precautions for Adverse Air Quality Events <https://publications.saskatchewan.ca/api/v1/products/127435/formats/150299/download>
7. Government of Saskatchewan – NITHA Face Masks for Wildfire Smoke Fact Sheet. <https://www.nitha.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Face-Masks-for-Wildfire-Smoke-Poster-May-2023.pdf>
8. Government of the Northwest Territories. (2016). *Smoke Exposure from Wildfire: Guidelines for Protecting Community Health and Wellbeing*. Retrieved from <https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/sites/hss/files/smoke-exposure-wildfire-guidelines.pdf>
9. Alberta's Extreme Heat Webpage. <https://www.alberta.ca/extreme-heat>

9.2 Event Organizers and Public Venues

10. Government of Canada – Protecting your physical and mental health from wildfire smoke <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/health/healthy-living/environment/air-quality/wildfire-smoke/protecting-your-physical-mental-health.html>
11. Government of Canada - Guidance for Cleaner Air Spaces during Wildfire Smoke Events <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/healthy-living/guidance-cleaner-air-spaces-during-wildfire-smoke-events.html>
12. Government of Canada - Using a portable air cleaner to improve indoor air. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/air-quality/indoor-air-contaminants/choosing-portable-purifier.html>
13. Alberta – Air Quality Health Index – Map <http://airquality.alberta.ca/map/>
14. ACA Live Air Data Map <https://capitalairshed.ca/monitoring-data/live-air-data-map/>
15. Active Air Quality Health Advisories <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/news/air.aspx>
16. City of Camrose – Air Quality Management <https://www.camrose.ca/living-here/environment-and-sustainability/air-quality/>
17. Saskatchewan Air Quality Map [Saskatchewan Ambient Air Quality Data](#)

18. Saskatchewan Ministry of Health Advisories <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/environment-public-health-and-safety/public-health-advisories/air-quality>
19. NWT Air Quality Monitoring Network <http://aqm.enr.gov.nt.ca>

9.3 Health Effects of Wildfire Smoke

20. Alberta Health Services. (2023, June 16). *Wildfire smoke and your health*. Retrieved from <https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Alberta/Pages/wildfire-smoke-health.aspx>
21. BC Centre for Disease Control. *Health Effects of Wildfire Smoke*. Retrieved from https://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/Guidelines%20and%20Forms/Guidelines%20and%20Manuals/Health-Environment/BCCDC_WildFire_FactSheet_HealthEffects.pdf
22. ACA – Particulate Matter and Your Health Clean Air Factsheet https://capitalairshed.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/CleanAirFactSheet_F_ACA-LR.pdf
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24. Government of Saskatchewan – Forest Fire Smoke and Your Health Fact Sheet <https://publications.saskatchewan.ca/api/v1/products/91860/formats/140030/download>
25. Government of Saskatchewan – Wildfire Smoke, Extreme Heat and Your Health <https://www.nitha.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Face-Masks-for-Wildfire-Smoke-Poster-May-2023.pdf>
26. Government of the Northwest Territories. *Wildfire Smoke and Your Health - Air Quality Self-Assessment Method*. Retrieved from <https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/sites/hss/files/wildfire-smoke-health.pdf>
27. Government of the Northwest Territories. Environmental Health: Air Quality. <https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/en/services/environmental-health/air-quality>

9.4 People with Pre-Existing Conditions

28. Government of Canada – Wildfire smoke and your health <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/healthy-living/wildfire-smoke-health.html>
29. Government of Canada – Health risks of air pollution <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/air-quality-health-index/health-risks.html>
30. Alberta – Air Quality Health Index – Map <https://airquality.alberta.ca/map/>
31. ACA – Live Air Data Map <https://capitalairshed.ca/live-air-data-map/>
32. Active Air Quality Health Advisories <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/news/air.aspx>
33. Asthma Canada – Wildfire Season Advice for People Living with Asthma <https://asthma.ca/wildfires/>
34. Environment Canada – Weather <http://weather.gc.ca/>
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36. Government of Canada – Air Quality https://weather.gc.ca/airquality/pages/index_e.html
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