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WILDFIRE AIR POLLUTION BILL CLEARS KEY HURDLE, HEADS TO SENATE FLOOR

Legislation sponsored by Breathe Southern California will protect Californians from the adverse health effects of wildfire pollution

LOS ANGELES, CALIF., August 27, 2021 – Breathe Southern California applauded the action by the Senate Appropriations Committee to advance Assembly Bill 619 (Calderon) which addresses the impact of wildfire smoke, and next faces a vote on the floor of the California State Senate.

AB 619 would require the California Department of Public Health to develop recommendations and guidelines for counties to use to establish plans for what they should do in the case of a significant air quality event, primarily those caused by wildfires. County plans would need to establish policies and procedures regarding air filtration masks and other protective equipment; how a county informs its residents about unhealthy air quality. The development of plans would involve consultation with key stakeholders, including government agencies, medical professionals, and advocacy organizations.

Wildfires are becoming more common and more extreme due to climate change, and the intensifying drought is a looming threat to the severity of future wildfires. As a result, fire season in California is starting earlier and ending later.

“There are approximately 90 fires burning in the West right now,” said Breathe Southern California President & CEO Marc Carrel. “But in addition to flames destroying property, wildfire smoke is a serious public health risk that can cause significant long-term harm for those breathing in wildfire smoke.”

Carrel explained that while the flames of the Caldor fire are threatening to reach the Tahoe basin, “the smoke from that wildfire has spread far wider, impacting the air quality for millions of people in the San Francisco Bay Area, the Sacramento region, and beyond.”

Researchers with the Scripps Institution of Oceanography at the University of California, San Diego found the particles released in wildfire smoke are up to ten times more damaging to humans than particles released from other sources. And a new Stanford study has found that breathing air polluted with wildfire smoke while pregnant increases the risk of premature birth.

“Given what studies are telling us about the effects of wildfire smoke and grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic, it is as important as ever to protect respiratory health,” said Carrel. “We must provide those who are most at risk from the horrible impacts of wildfire smoke the necessary tools, resources, and information to effectively manage their health and wellbeing.”

California experienced its largest fire season in modern history in 2020 with over 8,100 fires burning almost 4.5 million acres of land. Of the five deadliest fires in California history, three of them have

occurred since October 2017. The seven largest fires in California have all occurred since December 2017, including five in 2020 alone, and the still-burning Dixie Fire that is now largest single wildfire in California history.

Breathe Southern California recommends that if your area is impacted by wildfire smoke (and causes haze that often changes the color of the sun during the day), stay inside with your windows and doors closed, and use an air purifier with a high efficiency filter, or install a high efficiency filter in your air conditioner. Breathe Southern California recommends seeking other shelter if you do not have air conditioning. When windows and doors are closed, do not make your indoor air quality worse by burning candles, lighting matches or incense, using a gas or propane stove, using aerosol sprays, smoking, vaping, vacuuming, or cooking with oils that have a low “smoke point” like olive oil, which means it releases smoke at a lower temperature.

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