



COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO HEALTH AGENCY  
PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Update + FAQs: Smoke Impact on Air Quality and Your Health in SLO County**

San Luis Obispo – At this time in San Luis Obispo County, smoke is visible in some areas from the Thomas Fire in Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties. The Public Health Department and the Air Pollution Control District are working in partnership to continuously assess air quality, to identify any potential health impacts and to inform the community about safeguarding individual health.

The purpose of this update is to provide information about the current air quality as it relates to health, and to provide our current recommendations regarding protective measures.

**What are the conditions in SLO County?**

Current air quality is well within the range of normal in SLO County. Smoke and haze are in the air in SLO County, but mostly in the upper levels of the atmosphere. That means the smoke affects visibility—we can see the smoke or haze in the air—but is not at the level of the air we breathe. Current air quality in SLO County ranges from good to moderate. ("Moderate" means the air quality is acceptable and does not typically pose a health risk. "Good" is the best rating.) This chart provides more detail on recent air monitoring data for SLO County and, for comparison, neighboring areas:

CITY	DATE		
	12/8/2017	12/9/2017	12/10/2017
King City	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD
Atascadero	MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE
SLO	Not Available	GOOD	GOOD
Nipomo	MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE
Santa Maria	MODERATE	GOOD	GOOD
Santa Barbara	UNHEALTHY	UNHEALTHY	UNHEALTHY

LEGEND

GOOD	MODERATE	UNHEALTHY for SENSITIVE GROUPS	UNHEALTHY
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County of San Luis Obispo Health Agency

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[www.slopublichealth.org](http://www.slopublichealth.org)

**Why isn't the Public Health Department distributing N95 masks to the public?**

The use of N95 masks (also known as respirators) as protection from smoke is only recommended by public health experts when air quality conditions reach an unhealthy level. Currently in SLO County, the air quality is not and has not been at an unhealthy level.

The Public Health Department is closely monitoring the situation (hourly) and is prepared to distribute N95 masks if a health risk develops.

The Santa Barbara County Public Health Department is distributing masks because the air quality in their county has been affected much more significantly and directly by the smoke and fires.

**What if I want to wear a mask anyway? Are they available anywhere in SLO County? Can I reuse a mask for several days?**

While many stores in SLO County sold out of N95 masks over the weekend, many are receiving more shipments regularly. Please check with your local retailer if you are interested in obtaining N95 masks at this time. Note that N95 masks provide the most protection when they are properly fitted. These masks are designed for adults, but may fit a child if the child's face is comparable in size to a petite adult. Masks may be reused if they are dry and in good condition.

**What if someone in my family is very sensitive to air quality?**

The current conditions are not cause for health concern for most people. We recognize that some groups of people such as very young children, older adults, and people with serious underlying health conditions such as heart or lung disease may be especially sensitive to variations in air quality. People who are very sensitive to air quality will benefit from staying indoors.

Anyone who experiences shortness of breath, wheezing, exhaustion, light-headedness or chest pain should immediately stop any outdoor activity and contact their doctor.

**What if I see ash falling? Or if I smell smoke?**

If you smell smoke or see a lot of falling ash, we recommend that you take common-sense precautions to avoid contact with ash and smoke. This includes:

- Avoid strenuous outdoor activity
- Remain indoors as much as possible
- Set any heating/air conditioning/ventilation systems to recirculate

**What if conditions change?**

Air quality and the related health risk can change rapidly. The Air Pollution Control District is monitoring air quality hourly across the County, and the Public Health Department is closely following these results. If air quality becomes unhealthy, we will alert the public to take precautions. If air quality reaches a point where it is helpful to wear N95 masks, we will alert the public and will distribute these masks to the public.

**How often is air quality tested?**

The Air Pollution Control District collects air quality data 24 hours per day, 7 days per week at nine permanent air monitoring stations located throughout the county and at temporary air monitoring sites set up in areas that may be most impacted.

**Where can I get updates? How can I check the air quality in my area?**

For updates on current and forecasted air quality, visit [www.slocleanair.org](http://www.slocleanair.org). To receive air quality alerts by text message, visit [www.slocleanair.org/air-quality-alerts.php](http://www.slocleanair.org/air-quality-alerts.php) and sign up for Air Aware Alerts. You can also follow @slocleanair on Twitter.

For updates from the Public Health Department, visit [www.slopublichealth.org](http://www.slopublichealth.org), call (805) 788-2903 for a recorded information line, or follow @SLOPublicHealth on Twitter.

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