



9/11/2020

To: Oregon OSHA Director Michael Wood  
Labor Commissioner Val Hoyle  
Marion County Commissioner Kevin Cameron  
Governor Kate Brown

Agricultural workers make a significant part of the population of residents in the counties most affected by Wildfire smoke. Right now Oregon is in a state of emergency, and as we see evacuations in Marion, Clackamas, and Jackson County. It is important to understand that thousands of outdoor agricultural workers are breathing high density of smoke due to the unprecedented effects of the fires that are burning in our state today without any protections or instructions.

It is our understanding that Oregon OSHA has approved of agricultural workers being outside in level 1, 2 evacuation levels. Agricultural workers are currently working outside, ensuring Oregonian's have food, and ensuring crops do not go unpicked despite this global pandemic and wildfires burning in the background. Wildfire smoke is a health hazard for our agricultural workers as it can irritate the lungs and can cause fatal health effects such as worsening of asthma, heart failure and bronchitis. In these conditions it is difficult to breathe. We've received several reports that farms in Mt. Angel, Oregon are telling their employees to come to work despite level 2 evacuation orders. Workers have expressed concerns because there is little information in Spanish (which is the primary language of these workers, in addition to other indigenous languages), and many are having health issues when they go out to work, or not given precious time to be with their families, and prepare for evacuations if/when level 2 becomes level 3. Some farms and employers are making the decision to stop work due to unbearable conditions. Others are choosing to call their workers in despite the air quality. ***In all of this, we have heard radio silence from our leaders in agencies and industry about what must be done to protect workers in these times.***

PCUN would also like to request that Oregon OSHA take steps to protect workers during the wildfires. We'd like OSHA to implement guidance that would create clear instructions to employers for levels of fire smoke - with a "no work" policy when cities and counties are at level 2 and 3 during wildfires. It is paramount that OR-OSHA provide immediate and strong guidance to employers ***now*** on how to protect their workers from wildfire smoke. This emergency guidance should include a monitor of air quality levels, culturally appropriate communication from employers to workers on wildfire hazards, training and instruction information and employers should actively work to reduce wildfire smoke exposure to workers by providing NIOSH-approved respirators.

A year ago, California's Division of Occupational Safety and Health, implemented new standards for protecting outdoor workers from wildfire smoke. It requires employers to provide proper respiratory protection equipment, such as N-95 masks, when air quality is harmful. The Governor's Executive Order on Climate Action directs OHA and OR OSHA to work together and develop a proposal for standards to protect workplace employees from exposure to wildfire smoke and excessive heat no later than June 30, 2021. While this is a good first step, a proposal is not enough. ***We request that OR-OSHA adopt permanent strong rules to protect workplace employees from wildfire smoke and extreme heat in the near future.***

Our agricultural workers are bearing the impacts of wildfire smoke. Please take action today to keep our outdoor agricultural workers safe while wildfires ravage our community.

Reyna Lopez  
Executive Director