

Fact sheet:

Assessing health risk from smoke



Environment
Protection
Authority Victoria



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Smoke and air quality

Smoke is a collection of airborne particles, usually from fire. Smoke in the air is a complex mixture of:

- different size particles
- water vapour
- gases.

We measure particles in the air using measurements called PM_{2.5} ('fine' particles) and PM₁₀ ('coarse' particles).

We display information about Victoria's air quality on [AirWatch](http://epa.vic.gov.au/AirWatch): epa.vic.gov.au/AirWatch. AirWatch also has [air quality categories and general health advice](#).

If you don't have access to AirWatch, you can use visible landmarks to assess air quality and the health risk from smoke.

How to assess air quality and health risk during smoky conditions

A good way to estimate smoke levels and whether they may affect your health is to look at landmarks. They become harder to see when there's smoke in the air.

To visually assess air quality:

1. Use visible landmarks as a guide – estimate the distance from you to a landmark that's just visible (you can just see it).
2. Use this estimated distance and the table below to identify the air health category and the advised activity levels based on your [sensitivity to smoke](#). Take any necessary precautions.

Activity levels based on visibility, air health category and smoke sensitivity

Visible landmark	Air health category	Activity levels	
		People sensitive to smoke	Everyone else
About 20 km	Good	It's a good day to be outside	It's a good day to be outside
About 10 km	Moderate	It's okay to be outside but watch for changes in air quality around you	It's okay to be outside but watch for changes in air quality around you
About 5 km	Poor	Reduce prolonged or heavy physical activity	Normal activity
About 1.5 km	Very poor	Avoid physical activity outdoors	Reduce prolonged or heavy physical activity
Less than 1.5 km	Hazardous	If you can, remain indoors and keep physical activity levels as low as possible	Avoid all physical activity outdoors

Can you smell smoke?

Use your nose as an indicator of smoke. If you can smell it, you're exposed to smoke.

Further information

Contact EPA on **1300 372 842** (1300 EPA VIC) or epa.vic.gov.au

- Incident information and updates: emergency.vic.gov.au
- If you are experiencing symptoms that may be due to smoke exposure, seek medical advice or contact NURSE-ON-CALL: 1300 60 60 24

