



STATE OF IDAHO  
DEPARTMENT OF  
ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

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C.L. "Butch" Otter, Governor  
John H. Tippets, Director

October 23, 2018

Ms. Kelly Collins  
Legislative Clerk  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Responses to Questions for the Record on "Air Quality Impacts of Wildfires: Mitigation and Management Strategies."

Dear Ms. Collins:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify at the hearing entitled "Air Quality Impacts of Wildfires: Mitigation and Management Strategies" on Thursday, September 13, 2018. Per your request, please find attached my responses to your additional questions for the record.

If you would like further clarification regarding any of the answers provided, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of Mary Anderson.

Mary Anderson  
Mobile and Area Source Program Manager

Attachment (1)

## Responses to Questions for the Record for

Mary Anderson, Idaho Department of Environmental Quality

Hearing: Air Quality Impacts of Wildfires: Mitigation and Management Strategies

The Honorable John Shimkus

**1. What is necessary to increase the pace and scale of prescribed burning and other active forest management activities? More specifically what needs to happen at the Federal level vs State and local levels?**

Answer: From an air quality regulatory agency perspective, more collaboration and coordination is needed before more prescribed burning can be achieved. State and federal land managers need to coordinate closely with Idaho DEQ and other private burners. In order for the prescribed burning program to be successful, there also needs to be a collaboration and communication with the public. This coordination and collaboration needs to happen long before the prescribed burn is scheduled to occur. The following steps need to be accomplished prior to increasing the use of prescribed burning:

- Establish airshed groups – These groups will be based on defined geographic area and include all burners as well as other stakeholders such as the public. These groups will help prioritize burns and educate the public on the need for prescribed burning.
- Develop a comprehensive smoke management plan – Because many types of burning occur in Idaho, a plan that addresses all open burning is needed to ensure public health is protected.
- Coordination across state lines – Similar to the MT/ID Airshed group, burners and air quality agencies need to coordinate burn decisions across state lines.
- Increase in staffing – As I stated in my testimony, the current staffing level can barely keep up with the current level of burning. Additional staffing would be needed to ensure the public health is protected while maximizing the opportunities to burn.
- Evaluate all possible solutions – Prescribed burning cannot be seen as the only solution to the wildfire problem, other forest management techniques to remove wildland fuels must become part of the solution.
- Use smoke management principles – It is important to remember that reasonable and effective smoke management principles and decisions must be used when conducting prescribed burning to truly lessen smoke impacts and not simply move smoke from one time of year to another. The addition of more smoke into some of Idaho's airsheds through increasing the use of prescribed fire during October through December will put some communities in jeopardy of exceeding the national ambient air quality standards for PM<sub>2.5</sub> as well as adversely impacting the public's health. Data can be flagged as "exceptional," thereby excluding it from attainment demonstrations, but only if adequate smoke management principles are adopted and applied.

- Reducing emissions – Incentivizing the use of alternatives to open burning of wildland fuels as well as the replacement of old inefficient woodstoves are both needed concurrently to reduce the amount of emissions competing for the airshed.

**2. Can you provide your perspective on whether more coordination among federal and state authorities is needed to make a meaningful difference in reducing the risks of catastrophic wildfires?**

Answer: From my perspective there is always room for more coordination. Managing lands involves many agencies at both the state and federal level. The decisions made by these agencies also impact the public that live near these lands. With multiple agencies and stakeholders, collaboration is also needed to truly make a difference. More coordination will only be effective if all participants value each other's missions and mandates and are committed to finding common goals and balanced solutions.

**3. Should air quality considerations play a greater role in informing decisions related to wildfire suppression and forestry management planning, and if so, how so?**

Answer: Yes, air quality should play a greater role in informing decisions related to wildfire suppression and forestry management planning. One of the guiding principles of the 1995 Federal Fire Policy (reaffirmed in 2001 and 2009) is that "Fire management plans and activities incorporate public health and environmental quality considerations." When responding to wildfire, air quality should be one of the risk factors evaluated when determining the appropriate response, whether it is direct attack, conducting a back burn, or establishing point protection. When air quality deteriorates to the unhealthy, very unhealthy, and hazardous conditions, air quality should become a more important component of the decision making process. The same focus of wildfire suppression to commit resources for the protection of structures should be afforded the protection to public health whenever possible.

The Honorable Richard Hudson

**1. In North Carolina we recently saw one of the worst wildfires our state has seen, claiming over 55,000 acres. Not only do these blazes destroy our homes and lands, but they also impact our health. What type of risk communication strategy should states like mine who normally don't experience major wildfires put out to inform the public of the risks associated with wildfires?**

Answer: The key to responding to wildfire impacts is preparing ahead. Identifying key stakeholders and developing outreach material on the fly during the event is not effective. I recommend working during the winter months to develop a communication strategy with the stakeholders in your state. Idaho relies heavily on the Wildfire Smoke A Guide for Public Health Officials to make recommendations to the public ([https://www3.epa.gov/airnow/wildfire\\_may2016.pdf](https://www3.epa.gov/airnow/wildfire_may2016.pdf)). We also work closely with our neighboring states when developing smoke forecasts and communicating health recommendations for the public. To improve coordination and collaboration during wildfire response, DEQ and several partners developed a wildfire smoke response protocol to help mitigate impacts on public health by guiding air quality information distribution and health related messaging and outreach responses

through the appropriate agency. Idaho highly recommends developing a communication strategy with your state's health partners.

**2. From a health perspective, what are the impacts of wildfires? More specifically, how does smoke impact sensitive populations such as the elderly, children, or individuals who suffer from respiratory challenges?**

Answer: When it comes to smoke impacts, the sensitive populations include children (especially children age 7 and younger), pregnant women, older adults (over 65 years of age), individuals with pre-existing lung and cardiovascular conditions, and smokers. Symptoms from smoke inhalation can include shortness of breath, chest pain or tightness, headaches, coughing, irritated sinuses, stinging eyes, sore throat, and fatigue.

**a. How do you work with public health officials to alert communities about the health impacts of wildfire smoke? What steps can individuals and communities take to minimize the health impacts of wildfire smoke?**

Answer: Idaho DEQ coordinates closely with the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare (IDHW) as well as the local Health Districts during a wildfire smoke event. In collaboration with many stakeholders, we developed a Wildfire Smoke Response Protocol that identifies key stakeholders and contact information, agency expertise, triggers for agency actions, and recommended actions. DEQ and Tribal Air quality agencies provide current and forecasted air quality while the IDHW and Health Districts communicate health related information and recommendations to the public. The US Forest Service is also part of this collaboration and provides insight into current wildfire behavior to the group. We follow the information presented in the Wildfire Smoke A Guide for Public Health Officials to make recommendations to the public ([https://www3.epa.gov/airnow/wildfire\\_may2016.pdf](https://www3.epa.gov/airnow/wildfire_may2016.pdf)). Individuals and communities can take the following steps to minimize health impacts:

- Stay indoors
  - Keep windows closed and run a filtered air conditioner with the fresh air intake closed
  - Use room high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) cleaners that DO NOT produce excess ozone.
  - Create a clean room at home
- Reduce activity
- Stay well-hydrated by drinking plenty of water
- Follow your doctor's advice about medication and your respiratory management plan if you have asthma or another lung disease. This is best done prior to wildfire smoke impacting the community. Plan ahead.
- Switch to eyeglasses if you wear contacts
- Do not add to indoor pollution – avoid frying or broiling when cooking, do not vacuum or smoke
- Do not add to outdoor pollution – do not burn wood, limit using gas lawnmowers and driving