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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT WILDFIRE IN OU3

May 2025

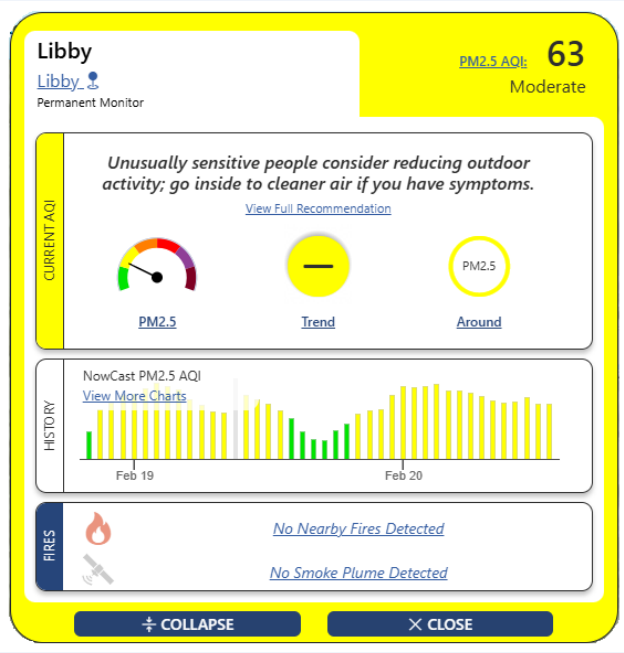
Will people be evacuated in Libby if there is a wildfire in OU3?

It is unlikely an evacuation would be necessary because of air quality issues alone. Evacuation notifications will be sent if the fire is close to homes. It will come from the Sherriff's office or CodeRed.

- Sign up for CodeRED to get emergency alerts.
- Follow the Lincoln County Emergency Management Agency (LCEMA) on Facebook.
- Learn more about the agencies' response to a wildfire in the Libby Asbestos Response Plan.
- A QR code to these resources is on the back.

What information should I be monitoring during a fire in OU3?

Checking the AQI during a wildfire event will let you know when you should take action to reduce your smoke exposure.



If a wildfire occurs in OU3, Lincoln County will monitor outdoor air concentrations of LA in Libby and in downwind locations. $PM_{2.5}$ is measured hourly and reported as an average for the 24-hour period if there is a wildfire or not. The Lincoln County Health Department will make recommendations based on monitoring results, weather and fire conditions.

Many wildfires are small in size (less than 5 acres) and may not put out much smoke. But some people are more sensitive to smoke than others.

People with heart or respiratory disease, children, pregnant women and older adults may be sensitive to smoke. As conditions worsen, these people may want to reduce exposures. They can do this by:

- limiting time outdoors
- closing doors and windows
- using portable air cleaners or high efficiency HVAC filters to remove $PM_{2.5}$ from their indoor air

The health department will provide exposure reduction advice and notifications based on the AQI.

How much exposure to LA puts me at risk for asbestos-related disease?

Asbestos-related disease occurs most often with repeated, long-term exposures (over many months and years). It may also occur due to exposures to high concentrations of airborne LA. **A single, or short-term exposure to low concentrations of LA from smoke, soil, or ash will be unlikely to result in disease.** However, as with all cancer-causing substances, people should limit exposure to LA if possible.

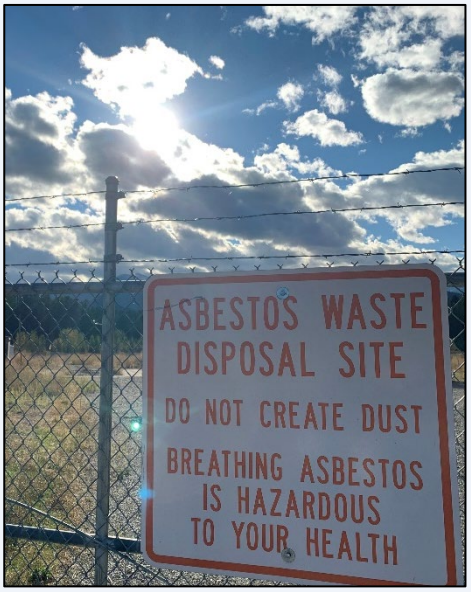
How confident are you in the burn chamber data?

The EPA simulated wildfire conditions in a burn chamber study in a small-scale laboratory-controlled environment. While this study provides useful information regarding LA and $PM_{2.5}$ concentrations during a wildfire, the chamber was not designed to mimic the behavior of a large wildfire or account for real-world meteorological conditions.

This is why the EPA has also done field studies of LA releases during experimental burns in OU3 as well as during wildfires. **Lincoln County, the EPA and partners are gathering data during wildfire events in OU3. This will give us the best understanding of the relationship between wildfire and LA concentrations in the air.**

What should I do if there is ash on my property after a fire in OU3?

If there is a large wildfire in OU3, ash may settle in Libby or surrounding communities. **Studies show that LA may be present in ash at low levels.** However, we need more data from large-scale wildfires. Residents may wish to take action to reduce exposure to ash. **Cleaning up ash will also reduce potential asbestos exposure.**



During ash cleanup, wet down material and avoid actions that kick ash particles into the air. This includes things like dry sweeping. Instead, use a hose to wet down outdoor surfaces and wet mop/wet wipe indoor surfaces. **As with any ash, minimize direct skin contact with ash. Wash your hands afterward. To dispose of ash, bag the ash and take it to the asbestos landfill cell.**

Will using an indoor air filter help during a wildfire in OU3?

Indoor air filters can lower $PM_{2.5}$ concentrations in homes. During a wildfire, **the EPA recommends using portable air cleaners with HEPA filters to reduce $PM_{2.5}$** on a room-by-room basis. **The EPA also recommends using HVAC filters rated MERV 13 and above** in a home's forced air system. Both HEPA portable air cleaners and MERV 13 filters can capture asbestos fibers. Learn more at EPA's indoor air quality website.

Resources

Questions?

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