

For Immediate Release
April 14, 2021

KDHE Issues Air Quality Health Advisory due to Prescribed Burns

TOPEKA – Prescribed burning within the Flint Hills region yesterday has contributed to elevated air pollutant levels for parts of southern Kansas, including Wichita, this morning. Additional burning today will continue to impact air quality for the southern Flint Hills westward, including Wichita, the Red Hills region, and perhaps as far west as Liberal. The Air Quality Index (AQI) will likely range from Moderate to Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups, and even Unhealthy at times for localized areas today through Thursday. The most significant impacts will occur during the evening, overnight and mornings hours. You can view the current air quality and AQI for your area on <https://www.airnow.gov/>.

Burning within the Flint Hills occurs annually to help preserve the tallgrass prairie, control invasive species such as Eastern Red Cedar and Sumac, and provide better forage for cattle. Prescribed burning minimizes risk of wildfires and is effective in managing rangeland resources. Smoke from the burns can influence the air quality of downwind areas and can be carried long distances.

Prescribed burns release large amounts of particulate matter (PM) and substances that can form ozone. Particulate matter and ozone can cause health problems, even in healthy individuals. Common health problems include burning eyes, runny nose, coughing, and illnesses such as bronchitis. Individuals with respiratory issues, pre-existing heart or lung diseases, children, and elderly may experience worse symptoms.

Steps to protect your health on days when smoke is present in your community include:

- Healthy people should limit or avoid strenuous outdoor exercise.
- People with respiratory or heart related illnesses should remain indoors.
- Help keep indoor air clean by closing doors and windows and running air conditioners with air filters.
- Keep hydrated by drinking lots of water.
- Contact your doctor if you have symptoms such as chest pain, chest tightness, shortness of breath or severe fatigue.

KDHE and partners continue to implement the Flint Hills Smoke Management Plan to help mitigate air quality impacts that result from burning. The plan includes recommendations to minimize and disperse the smoke produced by burning.

For more information about the burning in the Flint Hills and the Flint Hills Smoke Management Plan, please visit the following website: www.ksfire.org.