



Forest Fires Information for Seasonal Agricultural Workers

August 12, 2022

Background

It is summer in British Columbia and the forest fire season is here. At times, smoke-filled air may cause you concern. The purpose of this note is to provide you with some information on forest fires, health and safety.

Dry, hot weather during the summer, combined with a fire source, leads to forest fires. Some years are worse than others - the biggest risk is during long periods with high summer temperatures and without rain, especially when followed by windy weather. Many fires are caused by lightning strikes. Some fires are caused by people who are careless about campfires and throwing away cigarettes. Local governments put rules in place to prevent forest fires during high risk periods, including a ban on campfires, banning fireworks, and sometimes banning hikers from accessing certain forested areas. Information is available from the province (see website information below).

Safety - The Danger from Forest Fire is Low, but Be Prepared

The threat of being hurt as a direct result of a forest fire is very small. The government evacuates people if there is a risk of harm, or people choose to get out of the way of an advancing forest fire. For people who live in forested areas or have stayed in parks or wilderness locations, experiencing a forest fire up close is intense and can require moving out of an area immediately (sometimes less than 15 minutes warning). But that is only for people who are living in or very close to the forest.

For workers in orchards, the risk of direct harm from a forest fire is very low. For example, the very large forest fire in 2003 stopped at the edge of orchards, and the forest fires in 2018 also stopped at the edge of agriculture fields. The orchards are irrigated and too moist to ignite. Very rarely buildings not near the forest fire can catch fire - this happens when embers land on the roof or dry vegetation around the house or building.

It is unlikely that you will be in danger from a forest fire or be evacuated. However, certain farm areas may be evacuated due to concern about smoke and the need for firefighters to be able to move freely on roads with no other traffic. In the event of an evacuation:

- If you are here on the SAWP program, make sure that your employer or someone on your crew informs the consulate/liaison service of your movement and location.
- If you are a backpacker, in the Okanagan to harvest fruit, inform friends/employers of your movements and relocation.
- If you are relocating because of a forest fire, everyone should make sure that someone outside of the area (e.g. spouse, parents, friends back home) knows of your current location and your plans to move.

Evacuation centres will be established in the event of severe forest fires.

Smoke and Your Health

Another concern is breathing smoke caused by forest fires. In heavy smoke, you should reduce your physical activity by working at a slower pace, taking more frequent breaks or taking time off. Be sure to get the approval of your employer if you are taking more frequent breaks or taking time off. For workers with lung health issues (like asthma), let your employer or your liaison-consular service know if you have health concerns about smoke.

If you have breathing problems, you may need medical attention. At any time, if you are in medical distress, ask your employer to arrange transport to a local health clinic or hospital. For medical emergencies, dial 911. Be aware that there is a cost to calling for an ambulance - ambulances are for emergencies

If you are having breathing problems but not an emergency, first let your employer or camp manager know. If symptoms are not severe, then try stopping the work you are doing, go inside, cool down and rest. If you do not improve, seek medical attention.

More Information

Here is a great website for general information on forest fires:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/wildfire-status>

Contacts

If you see a forest fire start, you can report it by calling

Rescue and Emergency Medical service

If you are evacuated because of a forest fire, then
Your employer or local government will provide you
with information on registering and temporary shelter.

Foreign Agricultural Worker contacts

Jamaican Liaison Service

Barbados Liaison Service

Eastern Caribbean States Liaison Service

Mexico Consulate Vancouver

telephone

*5555 on your cell phone

911

Your employer's cell phone number

250-869-6288

1-416-464-4439/416-464-2997

1-416-523-4662

1-778-668-1242