



Forest Fires

Information for Seasonal Agricultural Workers

July 24, 2018

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 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 without rain, especially when followed by wind. Many fires are caused by lightning strikes. Some fires are caused by people who are careless about campfires and throwing away cigarettes.

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 very risky.

For workers in orchards, the risk of direct harm from a forest fire is very low. The large forest fire in 2003 stopped at the edge of orchards, and the forest fires last year also stopped at the edge of agriculture fields. The orchards are irrigated and too wet to start on fire.

Housing in the forest or immediately beside a forest are at risk. Sometimes, housing in an orchard catches fire, even though the orchard around it is not on fire - this happens when embers land on the roof or dry vegetation around the house.

It is highly 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. If evacuation happens and 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 relocating because of a forest fire, 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. Also, evacuees should register with the Canadian Red Cross, even if aid is not required. To register, visit www.redcross.ca or call 1-800-863-6582.

Smoke and Your Health

Another concern is smoke and your health. In heavy smoke, you should reduce your physical activity by going slower, 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. First, let your employer 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. 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.

More Information

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

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

Contacts

telephone

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

*5555 on your cell phone

Rescue and Emergency Medical service

911

If you are evacuated because of a forest fire, register
With Canadian Red Cross, even if aid is not required.

To register, visit www.redcross.ca or call

1-800-863-6582

Jamaican Liaison Service

250-869-6288

Barbados Liaison Service

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

Eastern Caribbean States Liaison Service

1-416-523-4662

Mexico Consulate Vancouver

1-778-668-1242

Your employer's cell phone number
