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Canadian Wildfires Affecting Air Quality in Northampton and the Region; Please Take Precautions

If you've been outside in the last day or two, you've likely noticed a haze in the air. The Air Quality Index, or AQI for the City of Northampton is currently at 160, which is in the "unhealthy" range. At this range, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommends that sensitive groups should reschedule activities or move them indoors. The EPA defines sensitive groups as people with heart and lung disease like COPD or asthma, older adults, children, and people with diabetes. Those who do not fall within a sensitive group are advised to avoid prolonged or heavy exertion outdoors and to take frequent breaks when the air quality is in the unhealthy range.

New England is experiencing hazy skies, reduced visibility and the odor of burning wood due to the Canadian wildfires raging north of our region. The smoke from the fires will likely linger for a few days and the shifting winds may result in changing air quality from hour to hour.

The Air Quality Index is a scale that measures the level of particulate matter (PM 2.5) - tiny particles in the air that are able to travel deep into the lungs, states Northampton Health Commissioner, Merridith O'Leary. Commissioner O'Leary recommends that "unless you're a member of a sensitive group, it's ok to be active outside, but take more breaks and do less intense activities. Watch for symptoms such as coughing, shortness of breath, or unusual fatigue. If these symptoms do occur, go inside. People with asthma should stay indoors if possible, follow their asthma action plans, and keep quick relief medication handy."

Northampton Fire Chief Jon Davine states that "the Northampton Fire Department will be monitoring the air quality index closely in the days to come and will keep residents informed. At this time we recommend keeping your indoor air as clean as possible by keeping windows and doors closed, using air conditioning if possible on recirculation settings, and limiting time outdoors, as well as outdoor physical activity."

Healthy Air Network <https://healthyairnetwork.org/>, is an additional local air quality resource. Established in 2021 by the City of Springfield, the City of Holyoke, the [Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts](#), [Live Well Springfield](#), [PV Asthma Coalition](#), [ReGreen Springfield](#), the [Earthwatch Institute](#), and the [Yale School of Public Health](#), the Healthy Air Network has air sensors across the region that are collecting live air quality data. These data are reported on-line in real time so that community residents can make informed decisions about their daily or hourly exposure to outdoor air. Sarita Hudson, Manager of the Pioneer Valley Asthma Coalition stated that "during the afternoon of June 6th and again this afternoon, many of the sensors in our region showed the air quality to be unhealthy for all. The site shows the winds blowing smoke our way and also displays information about high pollen rates that are making the situation worse for people with asthma and allergies."

For more information on local and national outdoor air quality, go to <https://gispub.epa.gov/airnow>