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## Smoke from fireplaces, firepits, and fireworks can harm health

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### Smoke from fireplaces, firepits, and fireworks can harm health

PIMA COUNTY, Dec. 26, 2025 – The crackling of fires in fireplaces and backyard firepits may be comforting and mesmerizing. But inhaling smoke can make it difficult for some people to breathe.

Increased use of wood fires on cool nights and during celebrations results in higher local levels of fine particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>). These microscopic particles can travel deep into

the lungs and can enter the bloodstream. Wood smoke also contains toxic pollutants including benzene, formaldehyde, acrolein and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons.

Fireworks are another source of air pollution, especially around New Year's celebrations. According to the American Lung Association, fireworks release particulate matter, sulfur dioxide, carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, and metals such as aluminum, manganese, and cadmium.

"Smoke from wood and fireworks can harm everyone, especially people with heart or respiratory disease, babies, young children, teenagers, older adults, those who are pregnant, outdoor workers, and people of low socioeconomic status, including those who are homeless," said Natalie Shepp, Environmental Quality Manager with the Pima County Department of Environmental Quality (PDEQ).

PM<sub>2.5</sub> can cause burning eyes, runny nose, coughing, asthma attacks, heart attacks, stroke, heart failure, lung cancer, premature death, and other health effects.

PDEQ recommends these tips to reduce smoke exposure and protect your health:

- Consider replacing fireplace fires with multiple large flickering candles.
- Clean chimneys seasonally to reduce creosote buildup.
- Burn hardwood like oak, mesquite, and pecan instead of soft wood like cedar, fir, or pine. Wood should be split and dried for at least six months.
- Use smaller pieces of wood for a hotter and more efficient fire.
- Allow ample room for air to circulate around burning wood.
- Never burn garbage, plastics, painted wood, plywood, charcoal, or printed paper.
- Occasionally check your chimney from outside while the fire is going. If you see smoke, your fire is not burning hot enough.
- Check local current air quality levels at [pima.gov/deq](https://pima.gov/deq), and if PM<sub>2.5</sub> levels are elevated, postpone plans to build a fire.
- If possible, stay upwind of fires and firework displays.
- If it is smoky outside, stay indoors with windows and doors closed. Use the setting to recirculate the air inside your home.
- Enjoy community fireworks instead of lighting personal fireworks.

Remember, if you smell smoke, you are breathing smoke.

*[The Pima County Department of Environmental Quality](https://pima.gov/deq) monitors air and water quality and hazardous and solid waste programs that minimize waste and prevent pollution. PDEQ also provides public outreach, education, and citizens' assistance; processes environmental permits; and responds to public complaints and inquiries with investigations and enforcement.*

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