



**AUTOMOTIVE  
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SERVICES**

# NEWS

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# ALERT

## Workplace Safety

# Protect Outdoor Workers from Wildfire Smoke

**T**HE MASSIVE destruction of the Los Angeles wildfires serves as a reminder that if you have outdoor workers who are affected by wildfire smoke, Cal/OSHA requires you to take steps to protect them against unhealthy air quality.

Wildfire smoke contains a number of harmful pollutants but the main danger to anyone outside in smoky conditions is particulate matter, which can lodge in the lungs. As well, with these fires, there are a lot of chemicals and other toxic fumes in the smoke from burning cars, tires, treated lumber, and more.

Under Cal/OSHA [regulations](#), if the air quality index (AQI) reaches 150 or higher (for particulate matter known as PM2.5) employers have three options for protecting their workers.

### Options for protecting workers

- Move the worksite to a safer location,
- Alter work duties or schedule to reduce time in unhealthy air, or
- Provide respirators like N95 masks and encourage their use.

If the AQI breaches 500, employees are required to wear respirators. To better understand how poor air quality affects health, you can get more details at the Environmental Protection Agency's [AirNow website](#), as well as [local air quality management district websites](#) that track AQI.

### Training

The regulations also require employers to hold staff training on:

- How to properly use N95 masks,
- The health danger of wildfire smoke, and
- The steps you are taking to protect them from wildfire smoke.

The Cal/OSHA standard also requires employers to:

- Alert workers when the air quality is harmful and what protective measures are available to employees.
- Encourage employees to inform supervisors if they notice the air quality is getting worse, or if they are suffering from any symptoms due to the air quality, without fear of reprisal.

### Exempt workplaces

- Buildings or structures in which the air is filtered and the employer ensures that windows, doors, bays and other openings are kept closed, except when entering or exiting.
- Enclosed vehicles in which the air is filtered and the employer ensures that windows, doors and other openings are kept closed, except entering or exiting the vehicle.
- Employers may also be exempt if they can prove that the AQI at their workplace is not 150 or above, or if it is only above 150 for less than an hour.

See 'Surgical' on page 2



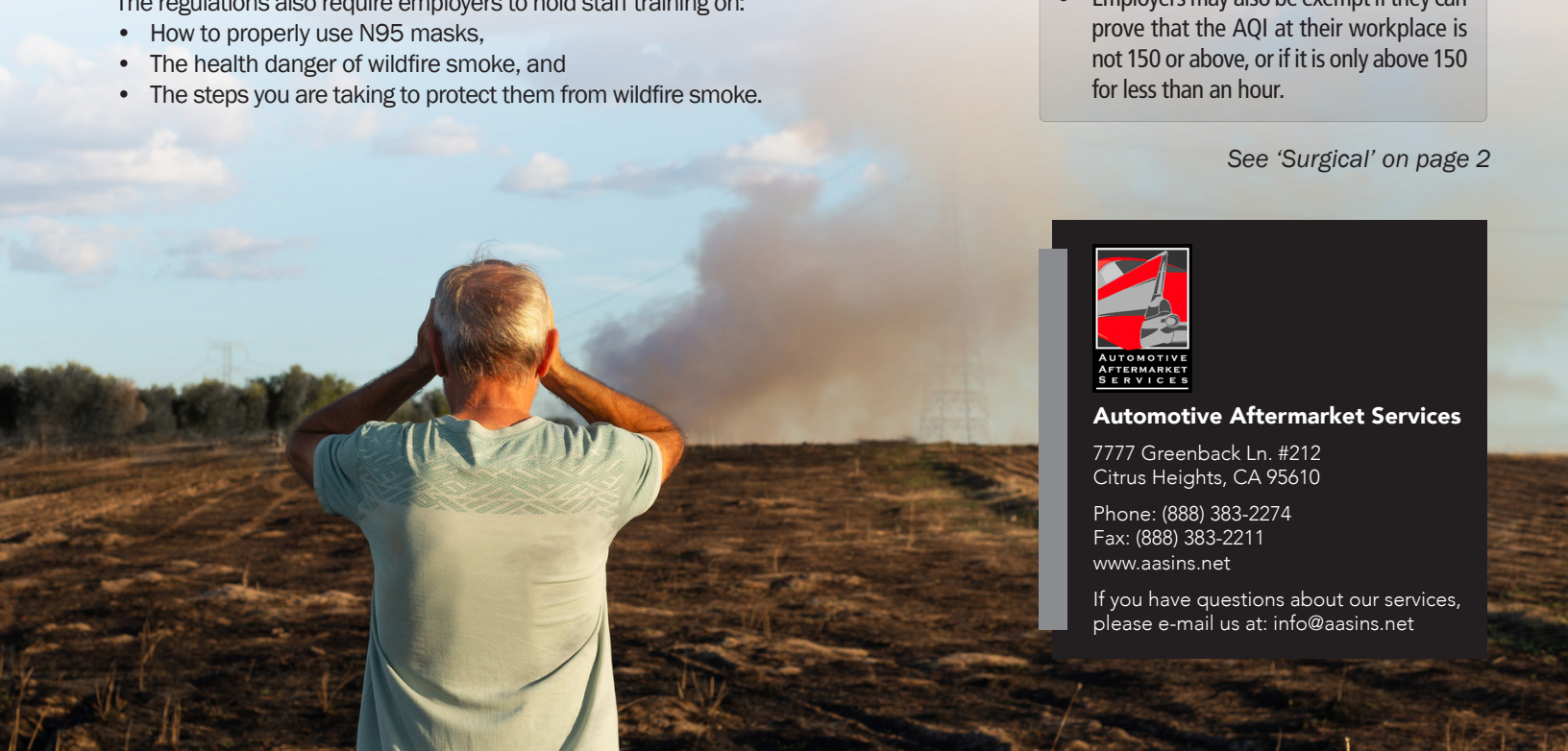
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# Calculating the Cost of Workplace Injuries

**W**ORKPLACE INJURIES can cost your company dearly. There's not only the loss of an employee who has to take time off work for treatment and recovery but also the hiring and training costs for a replacement, the risk of citations and fines by OSHA and the likelihood of increased workers' comp costs.

The National Safety Council estimates that the average workplace injury ends up costing more than \$40,000 in treatment and lost time. But just how much can an industrial injury cut into your profits?

## Calculating injury costs

OSHA's Safety Pays Program offers a calculator to figure out how much various injuries can cost you in terms of lost profit. It has a comprehensive list of the most common workplace injuries and includes other fields of data you need to enter to arrive at a cost.

The tool offers a worksheet where employers choose the type of injury from a list and then enter information, including workers'

comp costs, profit margin and number of injuries. The worksheet then provides estimates of direct and indirect costs, as well as the amount of sales that would be needed to cover these costs.

While this tool is only meant as a rough estimate, it can be a great visual to remind business owners, foremen and employees on how unsafe practices impact the company's bottom line.

In addition, Safety Management Group, a workplace safety consulting company, has an injury cost calculator that you can use to find the total costs to your firm from an injury.

It will also calculate indirect costs, including administrative time dealing with the injury and medical care, increases in insurance costs, the costs of hiring and training a replacement and more.

You can find that calculator [here](#).

## Safety as a profit center

These two tools can help you think of safety as a profit center rather than an expense. The following are just a few potential profit areas:

**Insurance premiums** – If you keep workers' comp and other insurance claims under control, thus lowering your X-mod, your insurer will perceive your company as a lower risk. Consequently, you may be eligible for reduced premium rates.

**Regulatory compliance** – Failure to adhere to OSHA-mandated safety requirements can result in substantial penalties. Having an effective safety program in place can help you avoid fines or reduce the severity of fines should a violation occur.

**Higher-caliber employees** – A well-trained workforce with proper safety training is an invaluable resource for any company. Not only will employees be more productive, but they will also be able to help identify unsafe conditions or operating practices as well as situations where jobs might be done more safely and effectively.

**Company safety culture** – Promoting a safe work environment improves employee morale. If employees believe the company cares about their well-being, they are likely to care about the well-being of the company. The result can be greater productivity and employee loyalty. ❖



Continued from page 1

# Surgical Masks Don't Provide Protection Against Wildfire Smoke

## Steps to take during wildfires

Monitor the AQI in the area your employees are working. This can be from online sources or by using your own equipment. Search for AQI monitors online to find one that fits your needs and budget.

Communicate to workers the importance of taking precautions when the AQI hits 150 and what protective measures are available.

If you plan to encourage the use of N95 masks (that you provide), tell workers that surgical masks or items worn over the nose and mouth — such as scarves, T-shirts and bandannas — will not provide protection against wildfire smoke.

A final word about evacuation zones: It's illegal for employers to retaliate against workers who refuse to work in evacuation zones. ❖

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# Employee Surveillance Doesn't Boost Productivity

**O**VER THE last few years, some employers have turned to tracking software to ensure that offsite staff are working while on the clock, and to boost productivity.

Tools like activity monitors and location trackers, however, do not actually increase productivity and they can instead cause a backlash among workers, affecting job satisfaction, according to a new poll.

Additionally, 26% of tracked employees said they distrust their employer and half of them feel pressured to work more hours, the survey by review website Software Finder found.

## What employers are using

**Time-tracking software** – Helps monitor when employees log in and out of work systems, and how they distribute their time across tasks.

**Screen monitoring** – Offers real-time insights into employees' screen activities, providing a glimpse into their work habits and efficiency.

**Keystroke logging** – Tracks every keypress, offering data on productivity and potential security risks.

**Communication monitoring** – Analyzes team messaging platforms to understand communication patterns, collaboration and information sharing.

## Employee resentment

The survey found that:

- 53% of employees believe it's a privacy violation for employers to track their activity.
- Three in four employees believe it's a privacy violation for employers to track their location.
- 36% of employees whose activity is tracked are currently looking for a new job, compared to just 18% of those who are not tracked.

Some employees have gotten wise and use a "mouse jiggler" which thwarts software that tracks mouse movements. .

This prevents tracking software from detecting inactivity and makes employees appear active when they aren't.

**FAST FACT: 17% of remote workers use mouse jiggling and 12% don't, but want to.**

## What you can do

*Insightful.com* has this advice:

- Don't track remote workers' time outside work hours.
- Don't install monitoring software on their personal devices.
- Don't track remote workers without consent.
- Don't use data to micromanage your employees.
- Don't ignore signs of burnout in your staff.

If you plan to implement tracking, be transparent about the process. The Software Finder recommends the following:

**Encourage staff to raise questions/concerns.** Keep an open line of communication with those who may feel that their privacy is being invaded. Be transparent about the implementation of monitoring software, and cover the program in meetings with your staff and address their concerns.

**Check in with workers.** You should hold a few meetings a year to check in with your workers about issues they may have. This will give you the chance to also adjust your tracking metrics.

**Train remote employees.** Your workers, supervisors and managers should know how to use the software properly, and be familiar with its features and understand why it's being used. ❖



# Employees Who File Claims Most Likely to File More

**A** NEW STUDY has found that people who have had workers' comp claims in the past are more likely to file future claims compared to those who have never suffered an on-the-job injury.

The study – the subject of an article published in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* – concluded that a past claim is the most predictive factor in determining the likelihood of future workers' comp claims.

While the findings shed light on a significant driver of workplace injuries, employers are in a difficult position as asking prospective employees about past claims experience is illegal in most jurisdictions.

The main findings of the study, "Reoccurring Injury, Chronic Health Conditions, and Behavior Health: Gender Differences in the Causes of Workers' Compensation Claims," are:

- A higher proportion of both men and women who had filed workers' comp claims in the past also experienced a subsequent workplace injury.
- For both genders, a past claim is the most predictive factor in determining the likelihood of filing a future claim.
- Women who had certain pre-existing behavioral risk factors like depression, poor sleep habits and headaches were more likely to file a subsequent claim if they had already filed one. These same risk factors did not add to the likelihood among men in filing second claims.
- Future claims are associated with individual workers' overall health.

## The takeaway

Besides addressing workplace hazards proactively, anytime you have a workplace injury, you should investigate to determine how the incident occurred. Once you identify what went wrong or broke down in your processes leading to the incident, you can address the problem through new safeguards and training.

Also, if an employee does file a claim, when they are back on the job you should give them additional safety training and attention to reduce the chances of them suffering future workplace incidents.

And what about prospective employees? First off, most states bar employers from asking prospective hires about any past workers' comp claims they have filed with previous employers.

The Federal Americans with Disabilities Act, as well as numerous state laws, seeks to protect job seekers from discrimination in hiring as a result of filing valid claims.

The bottom line is that an employer cannot request workers' compensation records in order to have a policy of not hiring anyone who has made a claim. It is discriminatory to penalize a person who has exercised a lawful right in a lawful way and filed a valid claim.

If you are considering trying to obtain past workers' comp records, you should consult with a labor lawyer before making any moves. ❖

