



## Imperial County

# Protect Yourself from Smoke from Agricultural Burning



### Why do farmers burn their fields?

Farmers burn their fields after harvesting to get rid of weeds, dead plants, and plant diseases, and to increase crop production.

### When do farmers burn their fields?

In Imperial County, farmers generally burn Bermuda grass fields in the winter and wheat fields in the summer.

### How does burning affect the air?

When fields are burned, particles and harmful chemicals get into the air. Most particles in smoke from burning fields are very tiny.

### How can smoke harm my health?

Particles and chemicals in the smoke can get into your throat and lungs and can cause breathing problems, including asthma attacks. Smoke can irritate the eyes and airways, and can cause coughing, a scratchy throat, irritated sinuses, headaches, stinging eyes, or a runny nose. Some particles can also pass from the lungs to other parts of your body and may cause other health problems.

For people who have heart or lung disease, smoke may make their symptoms worse. People with heart disease could have chest pain, shortness of breath, or fatigue. People with lung disease may not be able to breathe as deeply as usual, and they may have coughing, chest discomfort, wheezing, or shortness of breath.

Children, older people, and people who breathe smoke often are more likely to have health problems.

### **When is Burning of Fields Allowed?**

Farmers must get a burn permit from the Imperial County Air Pollution Control District (APCD) to burn a field. Farmers are only allowed to burn on days when wind and other weather conditions may lessen the spread of smoke. Farmers can only begin burning between 10 AM and 3 PM and must finish by sunset. If you see a field being burned outside these hours or want more information about any burn in the county, **call the Imperial County APCD at (760) 482-4606.**

## How can I protect my health during a burn?

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If you can **smell smoke** or **you are within 300 feet** of a field that is being burned (the distance of a football or soccer field), take the following precautions:

Go inside your home or school and:

- Close windows and doors.
- Run the air conditioning or ventilation system. If possible, set the system on “re-circulate.”
- Do not use swamp coolers or whole house fans. If it is very hot and you do not have air conditioning, you may want to go to a public place with air conditioning, such as a library.

If you are in your car:

- Use the air re-circulate mode.
- Avoid driving through smoke. Use roads that do not go near the smoke.

If you must stay outside:

- Get as far away from the smoke as possible.
- Avoid doing exercise or physical work.
- **If you must be near a field that is being burned**, wear a mask (respirator) that has the word “NIOSH” and either “N95” or “P100” printed on it. These are sold at many hardware and home repair stores and pharmacies. To help you choose and use a mask, please read the fact sheet “Protect Your Lungs from Wildfire Smoke” by the California Department of Public Health, available at:



N95 and P100 masks can help protect your lungs from agricultural smoke. Straps must go above and below the ears.

[www.arb.ca.gov/carpa/docs/smoke-mask-guide.pdf](http://www.arb.ca.gov/carpa/docs/smoke-mask-guide.pdf)

If you have been in or near smoke and are having a hard time breathing, very bad coughing, or chest pain, call your doctor or 911.

## What if I have asthma?

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For asthma and other respiratory diseases, follow your doctor’s directions about taking medicines. You should also talk to your health care provider about an asthma management plan.

## What more can I do about air pollution?

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Reduce outdoor activity between 5:00 pm to 7:00 am during the winter. During the day, smoke from burns generally rises up in the air. On winter nights, as the air cools, the smoke comes back down closer to the ground, making the air quality worse.

## How can I learn more about air pollution?

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Get information about the air quality in Imperial County, and learn about air quality and the Air Quality Index (AQI), at [www.imperialvalleyair.org](http://www.imperialvalleyair.org), or check the radio or TV news. The AQI number for the day tells you if the air quality is good or poor. To find out more about the AQI, read *Air Quality Index: A Guide to Air Quality and Your Health*. To get a free copy, call the Imperial County Public Health Department at (760) 482-4438 or go to [www.epa.gov/airnow/aqi\\_brochure\\_08-09.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/airnow/aqi_brochure_08-09.pdf).