



## Imperial County

# Protecting Staff and Students 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 health?

Particles and chemicals in the smoke can get into your throat and lungs and may cause breathing problems, including asthma attack. 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 the health of my students during a burn?**

Agricultural burns within a mile and a half of a school are scheduled by the APCD for the weekend.

If you **see or smell smoke** or **see a burning field near the school on school days**, call the APCD at (760) 482-4606 to find out if there is a burn and whether it is too close to the school. If the burning field is confirmed to be within a mile and a half, or the smoke is significant:

- Move physical education classes, recess, and sports practices indoors.
- Try to keep students inside buildings. Close windows. Run the air conditioning or ventilation system. If possible, set the system on “re-circulate.”
- Do not allow staff to exercise or do physical work outdoors.
- If students or staff have asthma or other lung disease, follow their doctor’s directions about taking medicines. Call 911 if they have severe symptoms.

## **What more can I do about air pollution?**

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?**

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).

U.S. EPA has developed the *Indoor Air Quality Design Tools for Schools* ([www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/index.html](http://www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/index.html)). It describes sound indoor air quality management practices, including air conditioning and ventilation practices.