

## **Wildfires and Smoke**

Wildfires have become a frequent occurrence in the western states and Canada. As a result of the large smoke plumes produced by these fires, which often extend over numerous states, Nebraska has experienced air quality impacts in the past. In 2016, flying activities at the Nebraska National Guard Air Show in Lincoln were cancelled due to smoke from Canadian wildfires that cast a thick haze over the region.

Each spring, land managers and ranchers in the Flint Hills of Kansas and Oklahoma conduct prescribed (planned and controlled) burns on an average of 2.5 million acres of grassland, which occasionally impact our air quality. The practice of prescribed burning is used for a number of reasons, but one benefit is the prevention of uncontrolled wildfire, which occurred in 2017 in southwest Kansas with devastating losses of livestock, property, and human life. The Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality has reached out to these states, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Regional Office in Kansas, and local agencies to foster communication and collaboration on our state response to air quality impacts from these fires. In coordination with these partners, we've developed numerous tools and resources to stay informed on potential air quality impacts in advance of their occurrence, communicate the potential for impacts to the public, and advise on steps to take if those impacts occur. The health impacts of smoke can be far-reaching, and has the potential to affect those with respiratory and cardiovascular conditions for days following exposure.

Overall, Nebraska has exceptional air quality, however, there are a number of tools and resources available to the public to monitor air quality:

<https://airnow.gov/>

Airnow provides the Air Quality Index (AQI) for over 400 cities nationwide. The AQI is an indicator of how clean or polluted the outdoor air is, along with associated health effects that may be of concern.

<http://www.enviroflash.info/>

EnviroFlash is a system that sends e-mails or text messages about your daily air quality forecast. The message is the same air quality information that the local radio or television stations provide, plus suggested safety measures when levels are unhealthy. This service is provided by your state or local environmental agency and the US Environmental Protection Agency.

<https://www.ospo.noaa.gov/Products/land/hms.html>

This website, operated by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), shows a map of current fires and smoke based on satellite data.

<http://deq.ne.gov/NDEQProg.nsf/OnWeb/AirSA>

The Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality (NDEQ) Smoke Awareness webpage contains useful information and links regarding air quality during prescribed burn season. Daily smoke outlooks are provided based on information from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment and Kansas Flint Hills Smoke Management.