

Old Barwick Mill Fire

Health effects of breathing smoke from the fire

This fact sheet, created by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), discusses the results of air samples collected during and after a fire at the Old Barwick Mill in LaFayette, Georgia. It discusses how breathing these contaminants may affect your health.



What did ATSDR do?

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) asked ATSDR to evaluate test results of air samples collected at, and near the Old Barwick Mill Fire in LaFayette, Georgia. This fact sheet tells you how breathing particulate matter, PM for short, could affect your health.

What did ATSDR find?

ATSDR evaluated the particulate matter (PM) in the air collected from 4 testing sites to see if breathing PM may have caused health problems. ATSDR made the following conclusions.

- Breathing PM in the air in LaFayette is unlikely to cause health problems for people who remained inside and sheltered-in-place during and after the fire. PM levels should be lower inside than outside houses.
- People who were outside and breathed smoke during and after the fire may have experienced health problems when PM levels were highest.
- People who are sensitive to PM may have had short term health problems caused by breathing PM when PM levels are highest. They may have health problems such as:
 - Coughing
 - Trouble breathing
 - Making asthma worse
 - Worsening of heart and lung problems

These symptoms should go away when people move to an area where PM levels are lower.

Sensitive people include those with:

- Asthma
- Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)
- Cardiovascular disease
- Children (under 18 years of age)
- The elderly (over 65 years old)
- Diabetics
- People with certain genes

How can I reduce my exposure to fire smoke?

- If you have respiratory problems such as asthma, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), or emphysema, stay indoors when you see or smell smoke.
- Reduce your outdoor activities, and do them more slowly, when you see or smell smoke.
- Close the doors and windows of your house to keep smoke from getting inside. Run heaters to maintain a comfortable indoor temperature.
- Talk to your health care provider if you have respiratory conditions such as asthma, COPD or emphysema, and you think your condition gets worse when you breathe smoke.
- Follow the directions and recommendations of your local or state health department.

Can I eat fish that died in the fish kill?

Fish kills are common following a fire because water used to fight the fire can be contaminated with chemicals. Contaminated water from the firefighting response may have spilled into an adjacent creek causing a fish kill. ATSDR recommends not eating the dead fish.

What will ATSDR do in the future?

- We will continue to evaluate air test results when asked.
- We will answer health related questions for community members and health care providers.
- We will continue to work with EPA to address public health issues.

How can I find out more?

For questions about ATSDR's work at the Old Barwick Mill fire, and in the LaFayette community contact:

Dr. John Wheeler, Regional Director, ATSDR Region IV

Phone: 404-562-1782

Cell phone: 470-426-9231

Email: jzw1@cdc.gov

Leann Bing

Phone: 404-562-1784

Cell phone: 404-747-4451

Email: kbing@cdc.gov

