



# VICTORIAN TRADES HALL COUNCIL APPROVED SAFETY STANDARD

VTHC2020.01

# Air quality

**All non-critical outdoor work must cease when the EPA Air Quality Index level is Very Poor.**

Air pollution, including bushfire smoke, contains a mixture of gases and very fine particles that are hazardous to health. Those most at risk are firefighters, other emergency service workers and those working outdoors.

There is currently no evidence of a threshold below which exposure to particulate matter does not cause any health effects. Health effects can occur after both short and long-term exposure to particulate matter, therefore outdoor work must cease when the EPA Air Quality Index reaches Very Poor.

PLEASE TURN OVER FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

# HEALTH HAZARDS OF POOR AIR QUALITY

**SHORT-TERM:** Making lung and heart conditions (e.g. asthma, chronic bronchitis, emphysema) worse. Asthmatics may need to use their medications more often.

Those who suffer from chronic bronchitis/emphysema or heart conditions are at an increased risk and need to take additional precautions, including staying indoors.

**LONG-TERM:** Unknown but depend on extent and duration. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has estimated that ordinarily approximately 3,000 deaths annually are attributable to air pollution.

People most at risk from particle pollution exposure include those with heart or lung disease (including asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease-COPD), older adults, and children. Research indicates that pregnant women, newborns, and people with certain health conditions, such as obesity or diabetes, also may be more susceptible to Particulate Matter (PM)-related effects. Cardiac arrests increased in Melbourne during 2006-07 when smoke from bushfires affected Melbourne residents.

Air quality is measured using the World Health Organisation Air Quality Index (AQI). It measures the particles that are in the air and then the EPA provides a level of Good, Moderate, Poor, Very Poor and Hazardous based on the number of harmful particles (PM10 and PM2.5) and gases (ozone, nitrogen dioxide, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide) in the air. For more information refer to the EPA website.



Scan with the camera app on your phone to access the EPA website.

If you are concerned about the levels of air quality, take the following steps:

1. Go to the EPA website and check the current Air Quality Index level for the closest measuring location: [www.epa.vic.gov.au/EPAirWatch](http://www.epa.vic.gov.au/EPAirWatch).
2. Find the Air Quality Index level below and implement the actions outlined in the table for that air quality level.

AIR QUALITY INDEX (AQI) VALUE	ACTIONS
<b>GOOD</b>	<p>HSRs: Under s35, request that the employer develop, in consultation with all HSRs, an air quality plan which will be implemented when agreed.</p> <p>Be prepared to issue a PIN if the employer refuses to discuss an air quality plan.</p>
<b>MODERATE</b>	<p>Employers: Consider limiting / rescheduling outdoor work for at-risk workers where reasonably practicable. Where not reasonably practicable, consider exposure duration and use of appropriate RPE. Ensure that there is appropriate first aid available. Ensure that workers are able to easily report any issues, and that the air quality plan provides for immediate actions should the air quality reduce. Monitor the air quality and take action as appropriate.</p> <p>HSRs: Contact employer in readiness for implementation of air quality plan.</p>
<b>POOR</b>	<p>Employers: No strenuous outdoor work for at-risk workers, and limit strenuous outdoor work for other workers. Ensure any workers who must continue to work outdoors have appropriate RPE that is fitted, available and is being used. Monitor the air quality readings frequently and increase controls immediately should the situation worsen.</p> <p>HSRs: Ensure air quality plan is implemented; consult with delegate; contact union. Talk to your DWG about the air quality plan, and any concerns they may have.</p>
<b>VERY POOR</b>	<p>Employers: Cease all non-critical outdoor work.* Ensure air pollution does not enter indoor work areas.</p> <p>HSRs: Ensure there is no non-critical outdoor work scheduled; request workplace air monitoring results where available; if the employer is scheduling non-critical outdoor work, issue an OHS s74 direction to cease non-critical outdoor work.</p>
<b>HAZARDOUS</b>	<p>Employers: Cease all non-critical outdoor work.* Ensure air pollution does not enter indoor work areas.</p> <p>HSRs: Ensure there is no non-critical outdoor work scheduled; request workplace air monitoring results where available; if the employer is scheduling non-critical outdoor work, issue an OHS s74 direction to cease non-critical outdoor work.</p>

**\*Critical outdoor work may only continue if the workers are provided with suitable RPE.**