



LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
REFERENCE GUIDE

TITLE: Air Quality, Weather and Wildfire Advisory Procedures

NUMBER: REF-886.4

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ROUTING
 All Schools and Offices

PURPOSE: This Reference Guide establishes procedures for the notification to schools and offices when an air quality, weather or other environmental advisory is issued. The South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD), Los Angeles County and California Departments of Public Health, and the National Weather Service are responsible for declaring health-based advisories related to air pollution (e.g., wildfire smoke, ozone, particulate matter) and hazardous weather conditions (e.g., excessive heat, high winds, etc.)

MAJOR CHANGES: This Reference Guide replaces *REF-886.3, Health Advisory/Air Pollution Episodes Procedures* issued on March 30, 2015. Procedures have been streamlined and updated to reflect guidance for wildfire smoke and to address continuity of learning plans when environmental conditions warrant a discussion of school closure. Information on air pollution causes and the Air Quality Index have also been provided.

- INSTRUCTIONS:**
- I. ALERT NOTIFICATION PROCEDURES
 - When an air quality, weather or other environmental advisory is issued, the Office of Environmental Health and Safety (OEHS) will initiate the following procedures:
 - A. OEHS will issue an advisory to affected schools and offices via email for the known duration of the event. In general, notifications are made District-wide for situational awareness.
 - B. Advisory information will be posted on the OEHS website homepage at <https://achieve.lausd.net/oehs> throughout the duration of the advisory.



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II. SITE ADMINISTRATOR RESPONSIBILITIES

Although advisories are emailed directly to schools, site administrators should check the OEHS website if concerns regarding air quality arise. Site administrator responsibilities are broken down into two main categories:

A. Regular School Program

1. Advise teachers, staff, students, and all other site users (e.g., Beyond the Bell, co-located charter schools, Parent Centers) regarding the health advisory.
2. Implement physical activity restrictions described in the Air Quality Index chart in Section VII, C.
3. Students and staff with special health problems should follow any additional precautions recommended by their physician. This information must be recorded on the student/employee health card.
4. Site administrators may consider sending a letter or Blackboard Connect message to parents and guardians (See Attachment A sample letter).

B. Interscholastic Athletic Programs

1. Implement physical activity restrictions described in the Air Quality Index chart in Section VII, C.
2. If an air pollution episode is expected but has not yet occurred at the time an outdoor interscholastic game or event is scheduled to begin, that event may begin as scheduled.
3. If an outdoor interscholastic game or event is scheduled to begin and an air quality episode is in effect, precautions outlined in the advisory must be followed which may necessitate event augmentation or cancellation. The school should communicate with the Interscholastic Athletics Department to coordinate cancellation or rescheduling of the game or event, as appropriate. Contact this office at (213) 241-5847 or at Interscholasticathletics@lausd.net.

III. EVACUATION, CLOSURE, & RELOCATION OF SCHOOLS

Extremely poor air quality, weather, wildfire, or other disruptive conditions may prompt consideration for evacuation, closure, or relocation of schools by the Superintendent of Schools. Factors to be considered whenever a school might be closed are listed below:



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- A. When a wildfire occurs near our schools, the local fire department may direct a school to evacuate when the fire poses a direct danger to building structures. Should this occur, immediate evacuation shall take place.
- B. State and local air quality and education agencies recommend that school districts use Air Quality Index (AQI) levels and associated health guidance as found in Section VII of this Reference Guide to make decisions relating to school operations (e.g., Minimization of strenuous outdoor activity, implementation of Indoor Activity Schedule, etc.).
- C. In rare instances, extreme weather or other exigent circumstances such as the Aliso Canyon gas leak may also prompt consideration for evacuation, closure, or relocation.
- D. Only the Superintendent of Schools may authorize the closure of school campuses. The Superintendent of Schools may consult with Local District Superintendents, Community of Schools Administrators, and District leadership as part of the decision-making process.

Although there are no fixed air quality, weather, or wildfire metrics from these agencies that specify when schools should close, the Superintendent of Schools will consider school closure when AQI levels are forecasted to be greater than 300 (AQI Color: Maroon). See chart in section VII, C.

Each situation has unique factors that are considered as part of the decision-making process. In addition to outdoor air quality and immediate threats to health, the following factors will be considered:

1. **Indoor air quality.** Ventilation and filtration systems at schools typically offer a higher level of protection than residential systems.
2. **Supervision.** The school environment provides appropriate student supervision by trained and caring adults who can ensure students remain indoors.
3. **Student support services.** School may be the primary place where students receive needed support services.
4. **Nutrition services.** Schools serve healthy meals to a significant proportion of students. If school is closed, it is a substantial challenge at best to feed students. Students receiving free or reduced-price meals may not have a reliable alternate source of healthy food.
5. **Access to childcare.** Socioeconomically disadvantaged families may not have options for alternate childcare.
6. **Working parents and guardians.** These groups are disproportionately affected by school closure and could suffer significant professional or economic consequences as a result.



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7. **Safe spaces.** Schools provide safe and supportive environments for their students; our most vulnerable students rely on them most.
8. **Transportation.** Temporary school closures, evacuations or relocations may present transportation challenges for students who rely on transportation provided by the District. School closures may also be necessitated due to road closures that impact access to schools.

IV. GUIDANCE ON CONTINUITY OF LEARNING

A. Assembly Bill 130 (ECS 46393), signed into law on Friday, July 9, 2021, stipulates Average Daily Attendance apportionment for Local Education Agencies (LEAs) during state of emergency occurring after September 1, 2021. LEAs who submit an affidavit for an emergency shall certify that it has a plan for which independent study will be offered to students.

B. Process

1. Once a state of emergency is called or the Superintendent announces a school closure due to a natural disaster or other extenuating circumstance, instruction is to continue online as soon as feasibly possible as dictated by the situation, but no later than 10 days after a school closure in dire conditions. For example, if a school is closed due to poor air quality, instruction could start online immediately or within 12-24 hours through online web conferencing tools and digital apps that supplement teacher instruction.
2. By the beginning of every school year, every LAUSD student and teacher – from pre-kindergarten through adult and career education programs – should be issued a learning device that can be used on and off campus and supports the issuing school’s instructional program. The school should also provide any services necessary to ensure the student has around-the-clock internet connectivity on and off campus (e.g., mobile hotspots, sponsored fixed broadband service, etc.). Students should bring devices to campus fully charged every school day to ensure minimal disruption to instructional time. Ensuring every student has access to a device to use off campus also ensures learning can continue in the event of a campus closure. For safety and sanitary reasons, students should not share devices with one another.
3. In the case of school closures due to natural disaster or a state of emergency, Independent Study master agreements are to be completed in a reasonable amount of time (e.g., 5-10 days). These agreements may be signed by electronic signature.

C. For additional information on online curriculum options and professional development, please visit: <https://achieve.lausd.net/instruction>.



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V. WILDFIRE SMOKE GUIDANCE

A. Protecting Children from Wildfire Smoke and Ash

1. In addition to the impact of smoke from local wildfires, smoke can also settle in communities hundreds of miles from the location of the fire and impact the health of students and school district operations.
2. Children are especially at risk for health effects from exposure to wildfire smoke and ash, largely because their lungs are still growing.
3. Children who breathe in wildfire smoke and ash can have chest pain and tightness; trouble breathing; wheezing; coughing; nose, throat, and eye burning; dizziness; or other symptoms.
4. Children with asthma, allergies, or chronic health issues may have more trouble breathing when smoke or ash is present.
5. Do not rely on masks for protection from smoke. Paint, dust and surgical masks, even N95 masks, are not made to fit children and will not protect children from breathing wildfire smoke.
6. Humidifiers or breathing through a wet washcloth do not prevent inhaling smoke.

B. During Wildfires

1. Implement measures to protect students and staff when smoke or ash is present or when otherwise advised by OEHS or Local District leadership.
2. Administrators shall implement an Indoor Activities Schedule in which students remain indoors with the doors and windows closed.
3. Students and staff may go outside briefly to travel between classrooms, restrooms, and offices
4. Run Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning Systems (HVAC). School HVAC systems have enhanced filtration capable of keeping smoke particulates out of buildings.
5. Use portable air cleaners if available.
6. Reduce health risks by avoiding strenuous activities.
7. For employees working outdoors when the AQI for fine particles (PM2.5) forecasted be or currently is 151 or greater, work activities shall be moved inside enclosed buildings with working HVAC. If this is not feasible, the work may be relocated to other areas, the work intensity may be reduced, or additional rest periods may be provided. For workers remaining outdoors, N95 respirators shall be provided for voluntary use.



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C. After Wildfires

1. Doors and windows may be re-opened once smoke is no longer present.
2. School custodial staff or Maintenance and Operations Branch staff should inspect the campus for fallen ash. Care must be taken to clean ash safely. Please refer to [Safety Alert 03-13, Responding to Wildfire Ash in Schools](#) for more details.

VI. HIGH WIND, HEAT, & OTHER WEATHER WARNINGS

If a high wind warning, heat advisory or other extreme weather advisory is issued before the weather event occurs, OEHS will send an advisory to affected schools or offices based on the following guidance:

- A. High wind warnings are issued by the National Weather Service for sustained surface winds greater than 40 mph lasting more than an hour, or winds over 58 mph over land that are either predicted or occurring for an unspecified period of time.
- B. Additionally, the National Weather Service will initiate alert procedures when the Heat Index is expected to exceed 105°-110°F (depending on local climate) for at least 2 consecutive days.
- C. Schools and offices should not wait for an advisory to be issued to take action. Often, weather conditions fall short of requiring an official advisory, but existing Bulletins, Reference Guides and websites provide detailed guidance that shall be followed whenever there is inclement weather.
 1. Refer to OEHS' dedicated webpage on heat illness prevention at <http://achieve.lausd.net/Page/16805>.
 2. [Bulletin-963.2, Guidelines for Preventing Heat Stress](#) is another good resource for schools and offices. for heat stress prevention tips.
 3. REF 5706.2 School Procedures During Inclement Weather contains guidance for a variety of weather conditions.
 4. Additional information may be found in each school's Integrated Safe School Plan.



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VII. AIR QUALITY INDEX (AQI)

- A. The AQI was developed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to help translate data collected from air pollutant monitoring stations into a scale. The AQI is a number that ranges from 0 to 500 that indicates how clean or polluted the air is, and what associated health effects might be of concern to diverse individuals within a population. The AQI focuses on health effects that individuals may experience within a few hours or days after breathing polluted air. The higher the AQI value, the greater the level of air pollution and the greater the health concern. For additional information on air pollution, refer to Attachment B.
- B. The AQI is divided into six categories with each category assigned a specific color to help visualize each category and the corresponding precautions.
- C. OEHS receives alerts and reviews air quality data daily and continuously during major air pollution events, such as wildfires. In addition to the resources provided by SCAQMD, OEHS monitors advisories from the Los Angeles County Public Health Department. The advisories sent out by OEHS are based on specific guidance from the above agencies and the following SCAQMD reference chart:



SCAQMD Air Quality Index
Cautionary Statements

Good (0 to 50). Air quality is considered satisfactory, and air pollution poses little or no risk.
Moderate (51 to 100). Air quality is acceptable; however, unusually sensitive people should consider limiting prolonged outdoor exertion.
Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups (101 to 150). The following groups should limit prolonged or heavy outdoor exertion: People with heart disease, pregnant women, children and older adults, people with lung disease, such as asthma
Unhealthy (151 to 200). Everyone may begin to experience some adverse health effects (e.g. difficulty breathing and throat irritation), and members of the sensitive groups may experience more serious effects. The following groups should avoid prolonged time outdoors: People with heart disease, pregnant women, children and older adults, people with lung disease, such as asthma.
Very Unhealthy (201 to 300). This would generate a health alert suggesting that everyone may experience more serious health effects. The following groups should avoid all outdoor physical activity: People with heart disease, pregnant women, children and older adults, people with lung disease, such as asthma. Everyone else should avoid prolonged or heavy outdoor activity.
"Hazardous" (greater than 300). This would trigger a health warnings of emergency conditions. The entire population is more likely to be affected. Everyone should avoid all physical activity outdoors.

**RELATED
RESOURCES:**

- OEHS Website: <https://achieve.lausd.net/oehs>
- South Coast Air Quality Management District Website: www.aqmd.gov
- Telephone SCAQMD: 1-800-CUT-SMOG (1-800-288-7664)
- California Department of Education, *Clear Guidelines for Schools and Wildfire Smoke*: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ep/documents/airqualityguidance.pdf>
- California Environmental Protection Agency, *Guidance for Schools During Wildfire Smoke Events*: <https://oehha.ca.gov/media/downloads/air/fact-sheet/wildfiresmokeguideschoolsada.pdf>



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ASSISTANCE: For information regarding this Reference Guide, call the Office of Environmental Health and Safety at (213) 241-3199.

For information regarding the Continuity of Learning, contact the Division of Instruction at (213) 241-4822.

For information regarding Interscholastic Athletics, contact the Interscholastic Athletics Office at (213) 241-5847.

For information regarding the Integrated Safe School Plan, call the Office of Emergency Services at (213) 241-5377.



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ATTACHMENT A

SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS

(School Letterhead)

(It is recommended that this letter be used as a guide to notify parents of a pending health advisory episode from the South Coast Air Quality Management District.)

(Date)

Dear Parent or Guardian:

The Los Angeles Unified Office of Environmental Health and Safety (OEHS) has notified our school that a health advisory episode has been issued for tomorrow by the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD). As a result, school staff will reduce physical outdoor activities to minimize the effect on students. It is suggested that parents and guardians do the same at home after school if the health advisory is still in effect.

For up to date, on-the hour information, call the SCAQMD at 1-800-288-7664 or visit www.aqmd.gov. OEHS will continue to monitor air quality conditions and provide updates as necessary.

Sincerely,

Principal



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ANEXO A

MUESTRA DE CARTA DIRIGIDA A LOS PADRES DE FAMILIA

(Papel Membretado)

(Se recomienda que esta carta se utilice como una guía para notificar a los padres de familia sobre un pendiente episodio de advertencia sobre la salud de parte del Distrito Administrativo de la Calidad del Aire de la Costa Sur)

(Fecha)

Estimado Padre de Familia o Tutor:

La Oficina Unificada de Salud y Seguridad Ambiental de Los Ángeles [(OEHS) por sus siglas en inglés] ha notificado a nuestra escuela que el Distrito de Gestión de Calidad del Aire de la Costa Sur [(SCAQMD) por sus siglas en inglés], ha emitido un episodio de advertencia de salud para el día de mañana. Como resultado, el personal de la escuela reducirá las actividades físicas al aire libre para minimizar el efecto en los alumnos. Si esta advertencia aún está vigente, se sugiere que los padres y tutores hagan lo mismo en casa después del horario escolar.

Para obtener información actualizada cada hora, llame al SCAQMD al número telefónico 1-800-288-7664 o visite www.aqmd.gov. La OEHS continuará monitorizando las condiciones de la calidad del aire y proporcionará actualizaciones según sea necesario.

Atentamente,

Director



ATTACHMENT B

AIR POLLUTION BACKGROUND

Air pollution is a complex mixture of gases and small particles suspended in the air. The different health effects of air pollution are dependent on how much of the pollutant is in the air, how long a person is exposed, as well as the person’s health conditions, age, and genetic background. Children, elderly people, and people with certain health conditions, such as diabetes, heart or lung disease, are more sensitive to the health effects of air pollution.

Locally, “smog” is primarily driven by two pollutants: particulate matter (PM) and ozone. The table below, courtesy of the SCAQMD, provides information on these two pollutants:

	Particulate Matter (PM)	Ozone
Type of pollutant	Small particles	Gas
Where does it come from?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combustion sources: cars, trucks, trains, ships, aircraft, certain types of facilities, meat cooking, residential wood burning, wildfires • Natural sources: dust storms • Much of the PM2.5 in the inland regions is formed from several pollutants mixing or reacting in the air. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ozone is formed when several gaseous pollutants react in the presence of sunlight. • Most of these gases are emitted from mobile sources.
Is it visible?	Yes, but only at very high levels	No
What are the main health effects?	Cardiovascular and respiratory	Respiratory
What are the most affected areas?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Areas near major roadways, ports, railyards, and other combustion sources. • Inland areas and valleys. 	Inland areas and valleys