



Nevada Public Health Association

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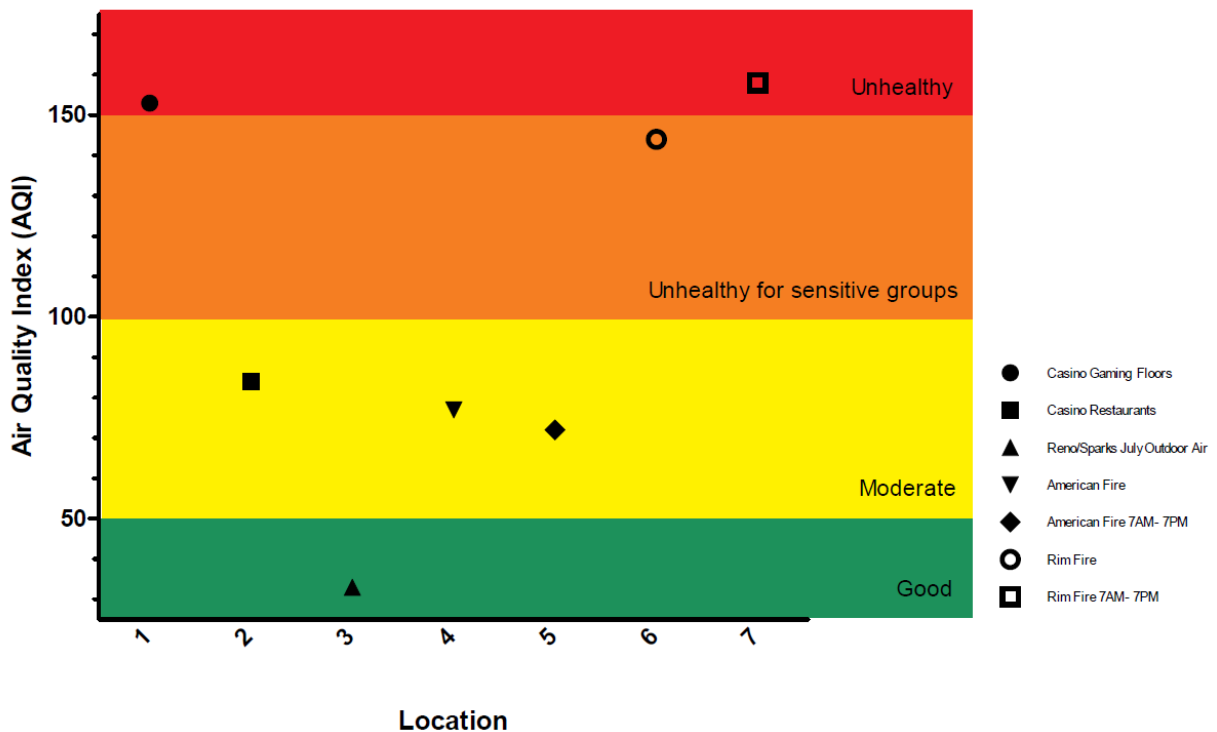
Air Quality from Recent Fires Comparable to Air Quality in Casinos

Smoke from the recent American and Rim fires has increased public awareness and concern for air quality standards in the Reno/Sparks area. During the weeks of poor air quality, the public depended on health advisories to help them determine whether or not they should spend time outdoors. Many outdoor activities, including sports events and practices were canceled. Numerous factors can affect the air quality; however, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) small particles in the air, referred to as PM 2.5, pose the greatest health risk as they are so small in size they can lodge deep in the lungs.

With the increased public concern about air quality from both the American and Rim fires, public health professionals and the Nevada Public Health Association want to make the public aware of how the air quality experienced with these fires compares to air quality found in casinos. A recent analysis by researchers from the University of Nevada, Reno compares normal Reno/Sparks outdoor air quality to what was experienced with the recent fires as well as to the indoor air quality of casinos, in Nevada and California, where cigarette smoke is common.

Data show that there is little difference between the indoor air quality of gaming floors in casinos and outdoor air quality caused by the recent Rim Fire (see graph below). Multiple air quality health alerts were released during the Rim Fire, while workers and patrons are exposed to similar levels of PM 2.5 in casinos on a daily basis. Air quality in casino restaurants was comparable to the outdoor air quality in Reno/Sparks during the American Fire. Air quality in casinos is primarily impacted by the use of cigarettes and cigars and can be prevented by eliminating the use of these products in all areas of casinos. According to the American Lung Association, 19 states and U.S. territories already have laws banning smoking in casinos. While both California and Nevada prohibit smoking in restaurants, the proximity to the gaming floor allows for secondhand tobacco smoke to drift into the restaurants and cause increased PM 2.5 levels.

Exposure to PM 2.5 particles can lead to a variety of health effects with both long and short term exposure. Exposure to fine particles can cause short-term health effects such as eye, nose, throat and lung irritation, coughing, sneezing, runny nose and shortness of breath. Exposure to fine particles can also affect lung function and worsen medical conditions such as asthma and heart disease.



Scientific studies have linked increases in daily PM 2.5 exposure with increased respiratory and cardiovascular hospital admissions, emergency department visits and deaths. Studies also suggest that long term exposure to fine particulate matter may be associated with increased rates of chronic bronchitis, reduced lung function and increased mortality from lung cancer and heart disease. People with breathing and heart problems, children and the elderly may be particularly sensitive to PM 2.5.

Lisa Genasci, Executive Director of the Northern Nevada American Lung Association, concludes, "The fact is that ventilation or air cleaning devices cannot protect workers and customers in casinos from the health effects of secondhand smoke. Just because you can't smell or see the smoke doesn't mean the chemicals aren't there. Everyone deserves to work in a safe environment – no one should have to sacrifice their health for a paycheck."

For additional information on the methodology involved in the collection of air quality data in casinos, please contact lead investigator Dr. Chris Pritsos at the University of Nevada, Reno at 775-784-6443 or pritsos@cabnr.unr.edu.

The Nevada Public Health Association (NPHA) is the state affiliate of the American Public Health Association and represents a wide range of public health professional disciplines and organizations. NPHA serves as the voice for public health in Nevada in order to improve health and achieve equity in health status. Our vision is a healthy Nevada. For more information on NPHA, please visit www.nphaonline.org.