

Wildfires are a Major Disaster, Creating Hazardous Levels of Toxic Fumes over Thousands of Hectares and Impacting Millions of Canadians across Western Canada

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The 2018 wildfire season in British Columbia is the second worst recorded: 2,005 wildfires, 9450 square kilometres burned. Compare this with 2017 when more than 12,000 square kilometres were scorched. 65,000 people were evacuated and the fire suppression costs were more than \$568 million. Climate change is a contributing factor with increasing average temperatures and lower precipitation. People with asthma, COPD or children and seniors are particularly vulnerable to wildfire fumes. These fumes contain particulates of respirable size, nitrous oxides, CO, volatile organic compounds and other irritants. Fumes are spread over thousands of square kilometers and depending on atmospheric conditions may linger for days and weeks. Further, mental health issues are more pronounced and a major concern for public health personnel. An all hazards response: the British Columbia Emergency Response Management System (BCERMS) is activated. This system has proved effective in dealing with major treats, bringing together all response agencies and their resources.

This paper will discuss issues of climate change, populations affected by wildfires, impacts on hospital admissions, mental health and loss of provincial resources.