Spokane Public Schools
Spokane, WA

In early September 2017, wildfires in the Northwest caused air quality issues that hovered between "very unhealthy" and "hazardous," impacting schools in the region. Kevin Morrison, director of communications and community relations for Spokane Public Schools, shared the following tips and sample message.

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- Our Facebook fandom is quite large so it was one of our primary tools. We usually posted twice a day, sometimes 3 times. Check out posts on our site from 8/29 to 9/15.

- We used air/activity guidelines that were developed by our regional health district several years ago. Our community has access to Real-Time monitoring of particular matter via the Spokane Clean Air website, and that helped us communicate and link to parents/staff/students what our decisions were based on.

- We have a very good relationship with local media, and referred all health-related calls to the Regional Health District epidemiologist. If media wanted to do a story on what indoor athletic practice or indoor recess looks like - we helped facilitate that.

- Our protocol was similar to our “winter weather” watch. At around 5 a.m. our Assoc. Supt would make the “indoor activity” call looking at the Clean Air site mentioned above. I would then post the decision to social media and our website. He would email all principals.

- We always include within our messaging that “Parents know what is best for your child’s particular situation. If you feel that for health reasons that they should remain home, we encourage you to do so.” That helps to alleviate the parents are wondering why we don’t shut down our schools.

- The best advice would be to make sure a district partners with the regional or local government agency responsible for air quality and/or health-related items – they should have the resources/handouts that you can consistently refer to.

- With regards to athletics, we had several outdoor track meets/football games scheduled. Make sure all your coaches are on the same page about process/procedures and what constitutes a GO or NO-GO call on outdoor practice and game day.

Sample Message from Spokane Public Schools

...
Due to air quality today, Friday, Sept. 15th, the district will once again follow the guidelines set forth by Spokane Regional Health District and Spokane Regional Clean Air Agency regarding cancelling outdoor activities (recess, field trips, and after-school practice) and limiting indoor activities.

Find the current air conditions here.

See the guidelines and recommendations our schools will be using here.

All administrators have been notified to bring students inside when they arrive in the morning to eliminate outdoor air exposure. At the end of the day, administrators have been asked to hold students inside until their bus arrives to minimize exposure.

District safety and maintenance staff, are visiting schools throughout the day to monitor the situation and provide assistance where necessary. This includes maintaining a balance of outdoor air and recirculation of indoor air to keep air as cool and comfortable as possible.

We appreciate the understanding of our community and support of our dedicated staff during this challenge time. Our schools continue to provide the safest, supervised, most comfortable environment for many of our 30,100 students. Your student’s health and safety are paramount to us. If you or your health care provider feel your home environment provides a safer alternative due to the current conditions, we urge you to keep your student home.

Thank you.