



## MEDIA RELEASE

KNOX COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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May 1, 2019

### **Air quality in north Knoxville affected by fire**

*Knoxville, Tenn.* – Smoke from fires, such as the one burning currently at a waste and recycling company on Hancock Street in north Knoxville, can affect air quality. The amount and length of smoke exposure as well as a person’s age and degree of susceptibility play a role in determining if someone will experience smoke-related health problems. Those in the area who are having any physical symptoms associated with smoke exposure (trouble breathing, chest pain, etc.) that don’t resolve after going inside or after taking their prescribed medications should seek medical care immediately. Those with questions or concerns should contact their medical provider.

“To protect your health, it’s important to remember that if you can see or smell smoke, move away from the area,” said Knox County Air Quality Director Lynne Liddington. “If you cannot move away from the smoke, shut your doors and windows and turn off your air conditioning units. If you are driving through the smoke, roll up your windows and turn your air conditioning to recirculate, so you are not drawing the smoke into the vehicle.”

Smoke can hurt your eyes, irritate your respiratory system, and worsen chronic heart and lung diseases. The effects of smoke range from eye and respiratory tract irritation to more serious disorders, including reduced lung function, bronchitis, exacerbation of asthma and heart failure.

People with heart or lung disease, adults over 65 years of age, children, and pregnant women have the greatest risk. People who have heart disease might experience: chest pain, rapid heartbeat, shortness of breath and fatigue. People who have respiratory allergies, asthma, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), including chronic bronchitis and emphysema, might experience: inability to breathe normally, cough with or without mucus, chest discomfort, or wheezing, and shortness of breath.

Even healthy people may experience some of these symptoms if exposed to smoky conditions for extended periods of time. Those with lung diseases, such as asthma, bronchitis, emphysema or heart disease, including angina or congestive heart failure, should make sure that they are on their medication. During unusually smoky conditions, individuals with asthma should stick to the asthma management plan they created with their health care provider.

The primary responsibility of the Knox County Air Quality Management (AQM) division is to achieve and maintain the National Ambient Air Quality Standards in Knox County, for all criteria pollutants designed to protect health and welfare, as set by local and federal law. This is accomplished, in part, by monitoring ozone and particulate matter in ambient air and by permitting of industrial air contaminant sources. The facility currently burning does not require a permit from AQM, nor are they inspected.

“While our monitors will detect particulate matter and ozone, they will not provide information on the contents of the smoke from the current fire,” added Liddington. “This is one reason it’s important for all those in the area to use caution.”

### **About Knox County Health Department**

As the first health department in Tennessee to achieve national accreditation by the Public Health Accreditation Board, the Knox County Health Department (KCHD) is dedicated to ensuring the conditions in which every resident can be healthy. KCHD investigates disease outbreaks, identifies community health threats, conducts extensive outreach and education, provides and connects the public with medical care, prepares for public health emergencies, enforces food safety and air quality laws, and more. For more information, visit [www.knoxcounty.org/health](http://www.knoxcounty.org/health).

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