

HVAC Expert Jason Baehr of Grass Valley Explains Indoor Air Quality During Wildfire Smoke for HelloNation

How can homeowners keep their air safe when wildfire smoke fills the outdoors?

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How can homeowners keep their air safe when wildfire smoke fills the outdoors? According to [a HelloNation article](#), HVAC Expert Jason Baehr of BAEHR Heating and Air, Inc. in Grass Valley, CA, explains how the right equipment settings, filters, and habits can make a significant difference in protecting indoor air quality during fire season. His guidance highlights the risks of using swamp coolers in smoky conditions and the benefits of managing central HVAC systems for cleaner, safer air.



The HelloNation article makes clear that wildfire smoke HVAC management requires awareness of how systems function. While many people view heating and cooling systems only as comfort tools, Baehr emphasizes that they also help control airborne pollutants. When smoke fills the air outside, HVAC systems, if used properly, can serve as a home's first defense against harmful particles and chemical residues.

One of the most important distinctions, the article notes, lies between evaporative coolers and central HVAC systems. Evaporative coolers, or swamp coolers, are efficient for dry climates, but in smoky conditions, they create a swamp cooler smoke risk by pulling contaminated outdoor air directly into the home. Unlike filtered systems, they offer no barrier to pollutants. For this reason, Baehr cautions against their use during wildfire season, even though they are otherwise effective for cooling.

By contrast, central HVAC systems can improve wildfire season home air quality if adjusted correctly. Many units feature a recirculate setting HVAC option, which limits the intake of outdoor air and instead cycles indoor air through the system repeatedly. This may seem counterintuitive,

but it allows the system to capture more particles while preventing constant reintroduction of smoke from outside.

Filter choice is another critical factor in wildfire smoke HVAC preparation. Standard filters are designed to protect equipment from dust but cannot block fine smoke particles. Baehr highlights that MERV 13 filter HVAC options are better suited for smoky conditions, capturing microscopic pollutants and chemical residues that lower-grade filters miss. Using high-efficiency filters in combination with the recirculate setting of the HVAC function creates a more protective barrier against indoor air contamination.

The article also explains that filters clog faster during smoke events. Frequent HVAC filter maintenance is necessary to maintain airflow and efficiency. A filter that darkens quickly is not defective but rather proof that it is catching pollutants. Replacing filters as often as needed during fire season ensures both steady comfort and sustained HVAC system efficiency.

Not every system is compatible with dense, high-efficiency filters, so the HelloNation article advises homeowners to check manufacturer specifications before making upgrades. Choosing the wrong filter can strain the equipment, reducing HVAC system efficiency instead of improving it. This step is essential for balancing protection with performance.

Beyond equipment settings, Baehr outlines practical household strategies for maintaining indoor air quality and smoke protection. Keeping interior doors open allows air to circulate more evenly, while reducing indoor pollutant sources, such as smoking, burning candles, or frying food, which helps limit the load on the HVAC system. These simple choices prevent added particles from worsening conditions indoors when smoke is already seeping in from outside.

Sealing the home is another step homeowners can take. The article stresses that closing windows and minimizing door openings reduces infiltration. Exhaust fans, often used in kitchens and bathrooms, can also work against air quality goals by drawing outside air in to replace expelled air. Using them sparingly during wildfire smoke events further limits indoor contamination.

Even with these measures, some smoke inevitably enters the home. Still, the article explains that combining HVAC adjustments with careful household practices results in healthier, more breathable air. During wildfire season, this combination provides residents with meaningful control in an otherwise difficult situation.

The HelloNation feature concludes by noting that these steps not only reduce immediate health risks but also support long-term HVAC system efficiency. Filters replaced on time protect motors and fans, and systems that are not overloaded with smoke continue to run more smoothly. For homeowners in smoke-prone areas, the benefits include both improved comfort and extended system life.

The full article, titled [“Smoke Outside Doesn’t Have to Mean Smoke Inside.”](#) provides further details on managing wildfire smoke HVAC strategies. HVAC Expert Jason Baehr of Grass Valley, CA, explains how equipment adjustments, filter upgrades, and smart household habits all work together to improve indoor air quality during fire season in his HelloNation feature.

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