

As Canadian Wildfire Smoke Chokes 20+ States, AMMA Calls on Feds and State Governments to Fund Domestic PPE Stockpiles

Urges Congress and governors to build regional stockpiles of NIOSH-approved, U.S.-made N95 respirators as wildfire smoke emergencies hit for 4th summer

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, July 20, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As smoke from more than 800 active Canadian wildfires blankets the Midwest and Northeast for a fourth consecutive summer, the American Medical Manufacturers Association (AMMA), the leading trade association for U.S.-based makers of personal protective equipment (PPE) and critical medical supplies, today called on federal and state governments to establish and fund regional stockpiles of NIOSH-approved N95 respirators manufactured in the United States, and to set that as the national standard for public distribution during air quality emergencies.

“ We need to fund regional stockpiles of American-made N95s. Behind every one of those masks is a family that's counting on us to get this right.”
Eric Axel, Executive Director, AMMA

This week, wildfire smoke triggered air quality alerts across more than 20 U.S. states, from Minnesota to Virginia. Detroit, Minneapolis, and Chicago recorded some of the worst air quality among cities worldwide. Ohio EPA issued a statewide air quality advisory, and Northeast Ohio's regional air quality agency issued a "Code Maroon," its highest alert level, signaling conditions extremely hazardous to the general population. Governors and mayors from the Great Lakes to the eastern seaboard have urged residents to mask up and stay inside.

But the response has been uneven. New York City is distributing free KN95 masks, made in China to a Chinese self-certified standard, at hundreds of libraries, NYPD precincts, and firehouses, and Wayne County, Michigan is handing out 70,000 stockpiled KN95s to seniors.

Meanwhile, Flint, Michigan, and Seneca County, New York, are taking the more rigorous approach: distributing NIOSH-approved N95 respirators — masks certified to the U.S. government's own safety standard — rather than KN95s. Michigan state health guidance

explicitly recommends NIOSH-marked N95 or P100 respirators. AMMA is urging every state and city responding to this crisis to follow the NIOSH standard.

"This is the fourth summer in a row that Canadian wildfire smoke has crossed the border and created air quality emergencies across a widening part of the country," said Eric Axel, Executive Director of AMMA. "This is no longer unprecedented. We can now predict it will happen every summer. The only question is whether America is ready with the right masks, made here, ready to go when families need them."



There is one U.S. standard for respiratory protection during air quality emergencies: the NIOSH-approved N95. N95 respirators are certified by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), tested against strict federal standards, subject to random audits, and manufactured under enforceable quality controls. They are the gold standard of respiratory protection in the United States.

By contrast, KN95 masks are manufactured to a Chinese regulatory standard that relies on self-certification rather than independent NIOSH testing. They are never made in the United States, yet communities are choosing to distribute them.

"Families dealing with a genuine respiratory emergency deserve masks that have gone through the same rigorous, independent testing every domestic N95 manufacturer is required to complete," said Tom Allen, AMMA President and CEO of Altor Safety of New York. "That's not a small technical distinction. It's the difference between a respirator that's been verified to work and one that hasn't. NIOSH-approved N95s made in America should be the standard — full stop."

A domestic supply chain the federal government itself has flagged

Reliance on imported KN95s also raises serious human-rights concerns. On June 2, 2026, the U.S. Trade Representative formally determined that China is among the economies that have failed to impose and effectively enforce a prohibition on the import of goods produced with forced labor — a finding serious enough to place China in the proposed 12.5% Section 301 tariff tier, the highest of the two tiers USTR applied in that investigation.

"We shouldn't be using public health dollars to stockpile masks that don't meet U.S. safety standards and that come from a supply chain the federal government itself has flagged for forced labor," said Donny Chan, AMMA Vice President and Executive at Maxter Healthcare, a Texas-based PPE manufacturer. "Domestic manufacturers can meet this need. We've already built the capacity. What's missing is the commitment to use it."

The health stakes are real. Research shows that each 10 µg/m³ increase in fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) is associated with an approximately 11% rise in asthma-related emergency room visits. Wildfire smoke exposure is now linked to an estimated 41,000 premature deaths per year in the United States, according to a 2025 Stanford-led study.

The US manufacturing capacity exists. Governments need to fund the stockpiles. AMMA member companies can produce roughly 435 million NIOSH-approved N95 respirators per year under normal conditions — approximately 97% of routine U.S. annual demand — and can surge to as many as 1.5 billion units per year during a declared emergency. That capacity was built in the years following prior public health emergencies specifically so the country would not again be dependent on unaudited foreign supply chains during a crisis.

AMMA is calling on Congress, the Department of Health and Human Services, and state governments in wildfire-smoke-affected states to:

- Fund and establish regional PPE stockpiles in states now regularly affected by wildfire smoke — including states across the Midwest, Great Lakes, and Northeast — sourced exclusively from NIOSH-approved, domestically manufactured N95 respirators.
- Set a clear procurement standard for federal, state, and local emergency distributions: NIOSH-approved N95 respirators made in America.
- Fully implement the bipartisan Make PPE in America Act — already signed into law and now moving through federal acquisition rulemaking — and extend its Buy American PPE principles to state and local emergency procurement.
- Direct HHS and ASPR to replenish the Strategic National Stockpile with domestically produced N95s and reusable respirators, so regional caches can be drawn down and rebuilt without new legislation each time.

"The fix isn't complicated, and it doesn't require starting from scratch," Axel said.

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