

TITLE: An assessment of the health impacts of the Labor Day 2020 Santiam Canyon wildfire, one year post-disaster

AUTHOR(S): Marc Braverman, Sandi Phibbs, Amanda Rau, Elijah Penner

PRESENTER(S): Marc Braverman, Sandi Phibbs

STUDENT SUBMISSION: No

TOPIC/TARGET AUDIENCE: Local government officials, healthcare administrators, healthcare providers, public health planners, natural resources personnel

ABSTRACT: Context: Wildfires produce physical and mental health community impacts that can persist for years. This presentation describes a community health assessment conducted in Oregon's Santiam Canyon, one year after the Labor Day 2020 wildfires. Study aims: The study, funded by Marion County, identified ongoing health needs of wildfire survivors and provided recommendations for local government, organizations, and healthcare providers. Methodology: Data collection included key informant interviews (n=36); an online survey (n=80); three focus group interviews with survivors (n=23); and analysis of health care utilization before/after the fire. Conclusions: Mental health issues were the most frequently identified health concern. Physical stress symptoms included headaches, sleeplessness, digestive problems. Almost 90% of survey respondents reported displacement to temporary housing, contributing to poorer diet and limited exercise. Water access and quality were significant environmental concerns. Residents expressed concern about potential, but unknown, health impacts of poor air quality and toxic exposure from the burned built environment. Public health implications: Identifying strategies and developing best practices for responding to wildfires and other disasters are critical public health functions. We found that survivors' challenges in dealing with housing displacement were compounded by food insecurity, mental/emotional stress, reduced healthcare access, and devastation to natural and built environments.

OBJECTIVE(S): Describe the primary health-related impacts that still exist for residents in the communities of the Santiam Canyon, one year after the Labor Day 2020 wildfires. Explain the underlying reasons for the persistence of these challenges. Identify potential ways that local government, organizations, and healthcare providers can address wildfire survivors' ongoing needs. Identify potential public health strategies for dealing with future fire disasters.
