

Study: Forest fires huge cost to health

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Canadian researchers say forest fires don't just have an impact on the environment, the blazes also take a toll on human health.

A study by the University of Alberta in Edmonton assessed the economic impact of air quality changes arising from forest fires. Researchers found the increases in human health risks were "substantial" in economic terms and were second only to timber losses in terms of dollars and cents.

Making a case study of a 2001 fire in Chisholm, Alberta, that charred 287,000 acres of forest land and burned buildings in and around the town, researchers used satellite imagery and monitoring stations to assess the contributions of the fire to concentrations of particulate matter in the air.

The scientists found the seven-day forest fire caused particulate matter as far as 100 miles away in Edmonton to soar well above air quality guidelines for Canada.

In terms of health risk, the study estimates the effects at between \$9 million and \$12 million, with 95 percent of the impact related to increases in mortality risk, restricted activity days, lost wages, and acute respiratory symptoms.

The study recently appeared in the Canadian Journal of Forest Research.

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