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For Immediate Release

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Wildfire in Atkinson County can pose health threat

A large wildfire continues to burn in Atkinson County. Smoke from wildfires contains a mixture of gases and fine particles from burning trees and other plant materials. The smoke can hurt your eyes, irritate your respiratory system and worsen chronic heart and lung diseases.

There has been a dense smoke advisory issued by the National Weather Service today and it will be in effect until 5 am on Tuesday, May 1st. The advisory is for Cook, Berrien, Brooks, Lowndes and Lanier counties. A dense smoke advisory means fires will create smoke limiting visibilities. If driving drive slow and use your headlights and leave plenty of distance ahead of you in case a sudden stop is needed.

If you have heart or lung disease, smoke might make your symptoms worse. Smoke may also worsen symptoms for persons with allergies, asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). When smoke levels are high enough, even healthy people may experience difficulties breathing.

Symptoms to look for include coughing, scratchy throat, shortness of breath, chest pain, headaches, stinging eyes, runny nose, and/or fatigue. If you experience any of these symptoms and have been exposed to the smoke from the wildfire it is best to contact your private health care provider or contact your local health department. Until the fire is contained it is best to use personal precautions and protect your self and your family members.

Here are some simple reminders to use for protecting yourself and your family:

- Stay inside with windows and doors shut;
- Use the recycle or re-circulate mode on your air conditioner in your home or car;
- If you do not have an air conditioner and it is too warm to stay inside, seek shelter elsewhere;
- Avoid cooking and vacuuming, which can cause indoor pollutants;
- Avoid physical exertion;
- Asthmatics should follow their asthma management plan;
- Keep at least a five-day supply of medication on hand;
- Contact your doctor if you have symptoms such as chest pain, chest tightness, shortness of breath, or severe fatigue. This is important not only for people with chronic lung or heart disease, but also for individuals who have not been previously diagnosed with such illness. Smoke can "unmask" or produce symptoms of such disease;
- Keep airways moist by drinking lots of water; and also keep in mind,
- Dust masks are generally ineffective with smoke.

For more information on weather patterns stay tuned to your local news station. For more information on health problems related to smoke contact your local health care provider.

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