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Wildfire Smoke from Canada Chokes Midwest, Northeast as Air Quality Plummet

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Thick smoke from hundreds of active wildfires in Canada is blanketing large portions of the American Midwest and Northeast, triggering widespread air quality alerts and health advisories across multiple states. Millions of Americans are being urged to limit outdoor activity as air pollution levels reach unhealthy or hazardous thresholds in several urban areas.

As of Monday morning, air quality alerts were issued in Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania, New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, Massachusetts, and Delaware. Detroit ranked as having the third-worst air quality in the world at the start of the day,

according to real-time monitoring from IQAir, an international air quality technology firm. Several other cities across the Great Lakes and Northeast regions reported similarly poor conditions.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Air Quality Index (AQI), a federal measurement system that categorizes pollution levels, showed swaths of the affected regions registering as "unhealthy" or "unhealthy for sensitive groups." The AQI ranks air quality in six categories: Good, Moderate, Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups, Unhealthy, Very Unhealthy, and Hazardous. Sensitive groups include individuals with heart or lung conditions, senior citizens, young children, and pregnant women, all of whom are particularly vulnerable to respiratory issues caused by fine particulate matter found in wildfire smoke.

Meteorologists expect the smoke to settle further over the next several days, worsening conditions for parts of the Northeast. CBS News meteorologist Rob Marciano warned that as the smoke sinks lower into the atmosphere, concentrations at ground level could increase, potentially worsening health impacts for already affected populations.

As of Monday, the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre reported more than 700 wildfires still actively burning across Canada, contributing to what has already been one of the country's worst wildfire seasons on record. Many of these fires are concentrated in the provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, and Quebec, with prevailing winds carrying smoke hundreds of miles into the U.S.

Officials across affected states have advised residents to remain indoors where possible, run air purifiers if available, and avoid strenuous outdoor activities. Local governments are also monitoring conditions closely and issuing school and workplace guidance as necessary.

While smoke-related air quality issues are not unprecedented, the frequency and scale of such events in recent years have raised growing concerns about fire management strategies in Canada and the cross-border impact of such disasters on U.S. health and infrastructure. As the situation develops, state and federal agencies continue to coordinate responses and provide real-time updates to the public.

Residents can check their local AQI via the EPA's AirNow website or through smartphone weather apps that monitor pollution levels.