


Air Quality Health Alert Decision-making Process for Local Incidents



Environmental Health Departments standard operating procedures and process for determining when to issue a health alert.

PRESENTATION: Jeff Stonesifer

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH | DEC 2025





Need for information

- Once the CABQ Air Quality Program becomes aware of an incident, the need for a health alert is assessed.
- Initial decisions:
 - Is a health alert appropriate?
 - How long should it be effective until?



Specific information needed

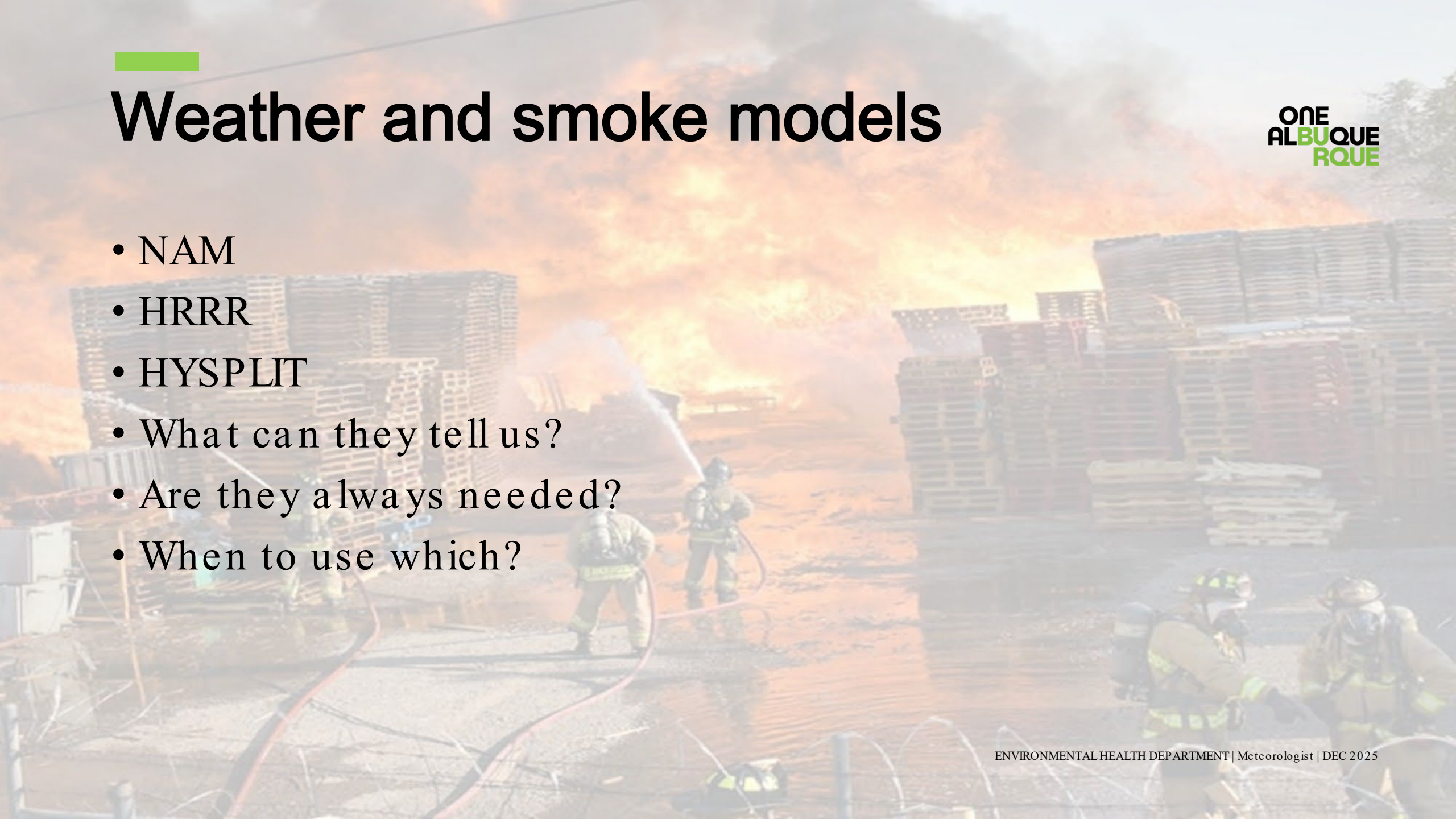
- What is burning?
- Toxic release?
 - Air Quality Program, Office of Emergency Management, or Albuquerque Fire Rescue?
- How much smoke is being emitted?
- How soon will it be under control?
- Will it burn into the night?

A large fire is burning in a warehouse, with thick smoke rising into the air. Several firefighters in full protective gear are visible in the foreground, working to contain the fire. The scene is chaotic, with debris and fire hoses scattered on the ground.

Sources for gathering information



- Albuquerque Fire Rescue/ Bernalillo County Fire and Rescue
- National Weather Service webcams
- Air Quality Program Monitors
- Local news videos of fire and smoke plume



Weather and smoke models

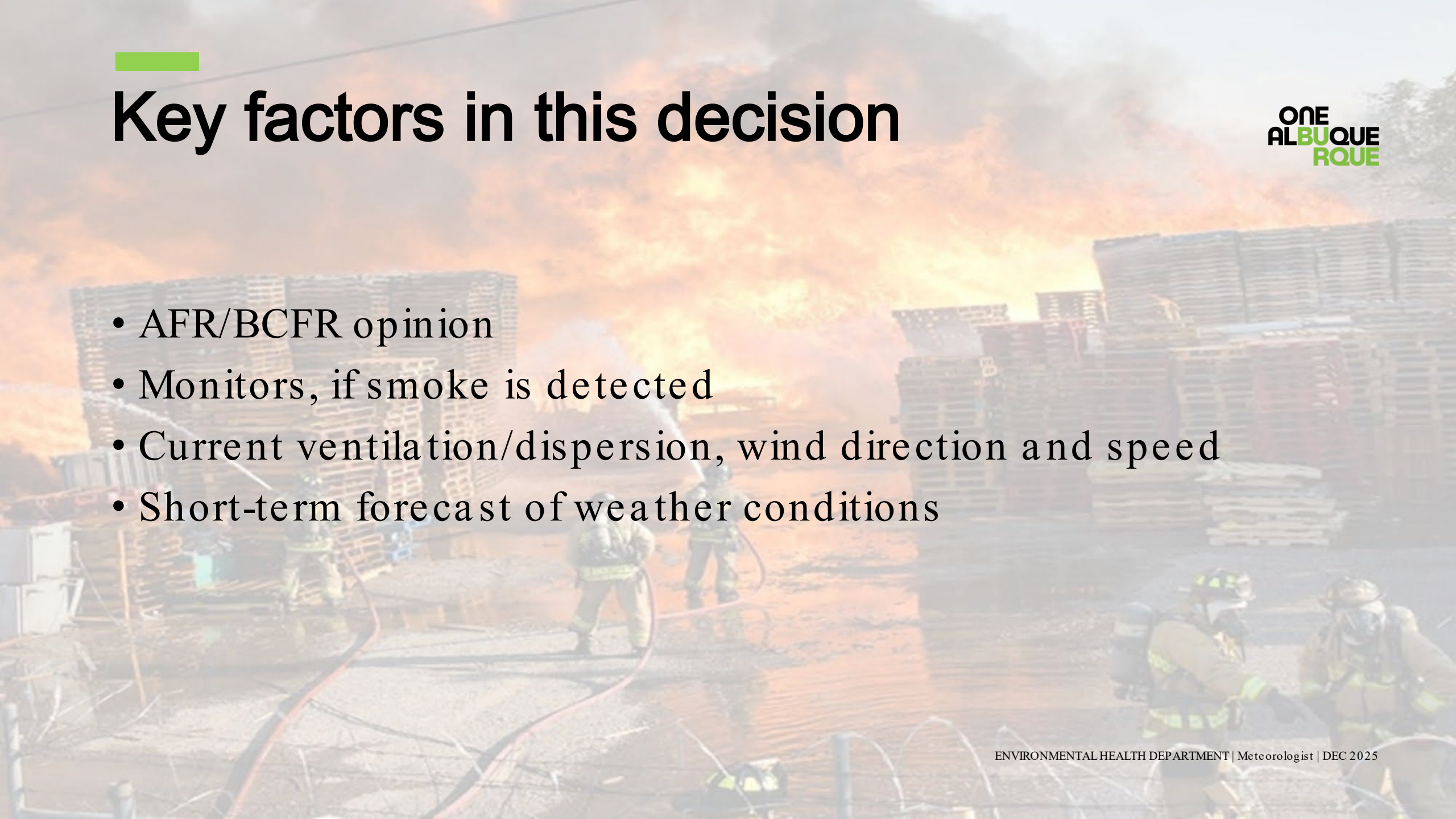
- NAM
- HRRR
- HYSPLIT
- What can they tell us?
- Are they always needed?
- When to use which?



NWS forecasts

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- MOS guidance
- Terminal forecasts
- Zone forecasts
- Fire weather forecast for ventilation
- Call the NWS



Key factors in this decision

- AFR/BCFR opinion
- Monitors, if smoke is detected
- Current ventilation/dispersion, wind direction and speed
- Short-term forecast of weather conditions



Health Alerts



- The Air Quality Program issues health alerts if conditions worsen to the point that individuals with respiratory conditions may be adversely impacted by outdoor activity.
- Health Alerts are typically issued because of elevated levels of dust or smoke. Both dust and smoke are types of particulate matter.
- The Air Quality Program issues health alerts for ozone when ozone levels exceed 70 parts per billion (ppb) over an 8-hour average.
- People who are sensitive to particulate matter, such as those with asthma, chronic bronchitis and other respiratory and heart diseases, are encouraged to limit outdoor activity.
- Children and older adults may also be affected by particulate pollution.



Proactive Alerts



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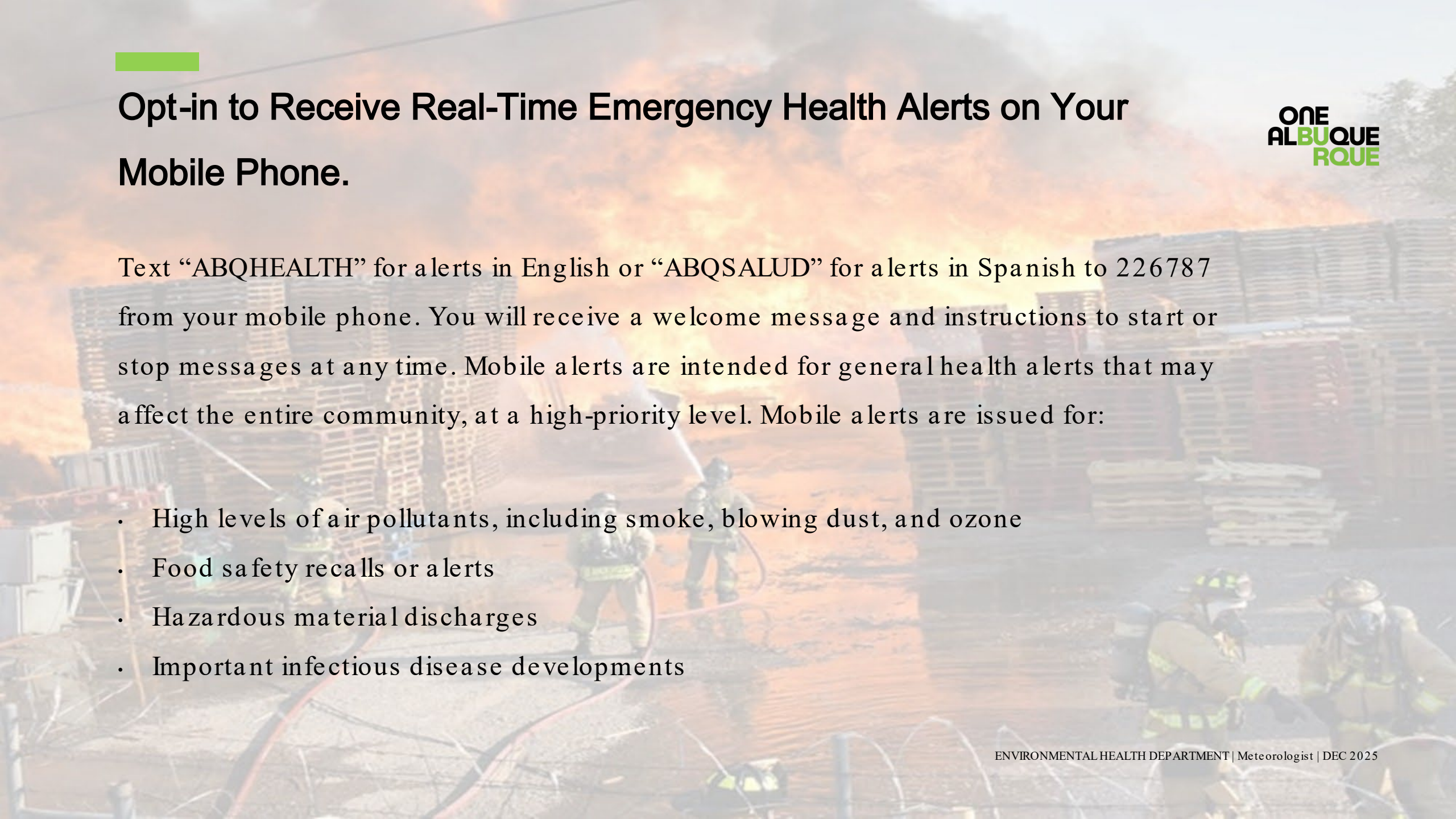
Air Quality Forecast

AIR QUALITY FORECAST

Due to wildfires around the region, PM2.5 levels are somewhat elevated across the Albuquerque metro this morning. The levels aren't high enough to warrant a health alert, but certainly are affecting visibility and may fuel ozone production this afternoon (depending on how much smoke lingers into the afternoon).

Light winds and mostly sunny skies are expected this afternoon which favor increasing ozone levels, however the upper - level high-pressure system isn't building and it's not sitting over the Four Corners...so there are competing factors for ozone levels in the meteorology. NOAA's HRRR smoke model shows PM2.5/smoke levels going down

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Opt-in to Receive Real-Time Emergency Health Alerts on Your Mobile Phone.



Text “ABQHEALTH” for alerts in English or “ABQSALUD” for alerts in Spanish to 226787 from your mobile phone. You will receive a welcome message and instructions to start or stop messages at any time. Mobile alerts are intended for general health alerts that may affect the entire community, at a high-priority level. Mobile alerts are issued for:

- High levels of air pollutants, including smoke, blowing dust, and ozone
- Food safety recalls or alerts
- Hazardous material discharges
- Important infectious disease developments



Up Next:

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**Jeremy Dyer
Public Information Officer**



Alerts - Public Communications



Environmental Health Department standard operating procedures and process for communicating health alerts.

PRESENTATION: Jeremy T. Dyer

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What triggers an alert from comms?



If the environmental scientists' thresholds are triggered for an alert, an email and a text message is sent to the PIO and department leadership advising them an alert is required along with pertinent details about the alert.

- High levels of air pollutants – smoke, blowing dust, ozone, etc.
- Hazardous material discharges
- Effective date/time to expected end of the alert
- Note for safety for high-risk populations

Communications are sent on multiple platforms after confirmation from the environmental scientist.

Communication Channels

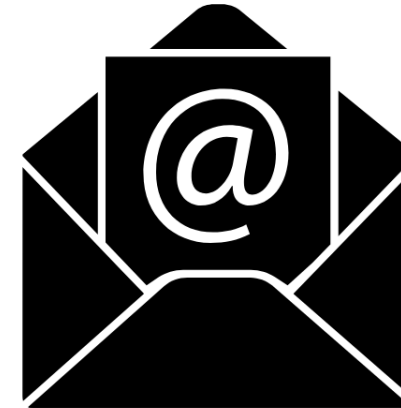
- **Social Media:**
 - Facebook: more than **1.4K** followers
 - X (formerly Twitter): more than **1.5K** followers
- **Text – Opt-in service:**
 - English: more than **3.1K** subscribers – average rate of viewing message is more than **2.8K** views
 - Spanish: **39** subscribers – average rate of viewing message is **35** subscribers
- **E-mail – Opt-in service:**
 - More than **15.7K** contacts in our system – nearly **10K** are still active subscribers
 - Our Alerts in the past year received an open rate of nearly **45%** - higher than our average for the daily alerts
 - Alerts also go to a separate email list for all of our media contacts in the area – print, television, and radio outlets
- **Total combined reach on our platforms:** more than **18.8K** people and growing
 - ABQ media area reaches is roughly **708K** TV households – in addition to their own online presence
 - Print/online readership is roughly **340K**
 - KUNM Radio has an average reach of **90K** listeners



@CABQAirQuality



@CABQAir



Visit: www.cabq.gov/airquality to sign up for email alerts



Text: ABQHealth for English or ABQSalud for Spanish to 226787

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Public Health Outreach & Education



The Public Health Compliance Manager with the Air Quality Program runs our proactive community outreach program dedicated to educating the public on air quality, health, and safety. They provide information on how to sign-up for our Health Alerts via email, text, and our social media platforms.

Events info:

- 14 events in the past year
 - Community, family, senior, etc.
- Roughly 4.2K people reached during these events

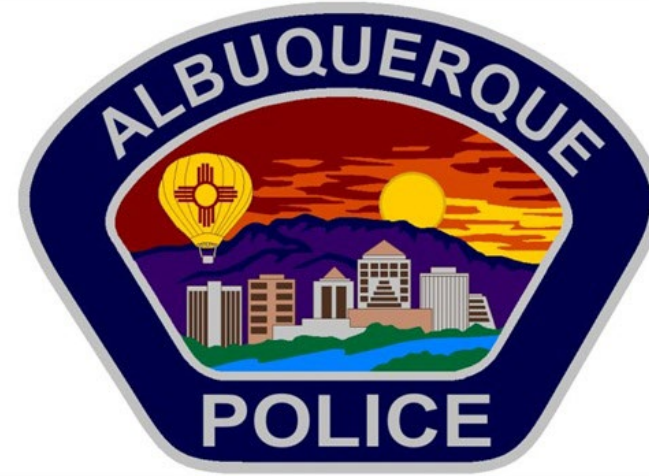
The outreach program will provide training and education upon request and scheduling availability.

Multiagency Responses to an Event



Incident Commander and Communications

- In situations where emergency response agencies become involved – such as structure fires, etc. – primary communications shift from EHD to the appropriate agency. In cases of fires, AFR takes lead.
- AFR / OEM makes the call on pushing out further safety instructions for the impacted community as needed.



emergency
management

Office of Emergency Management - Geofencing

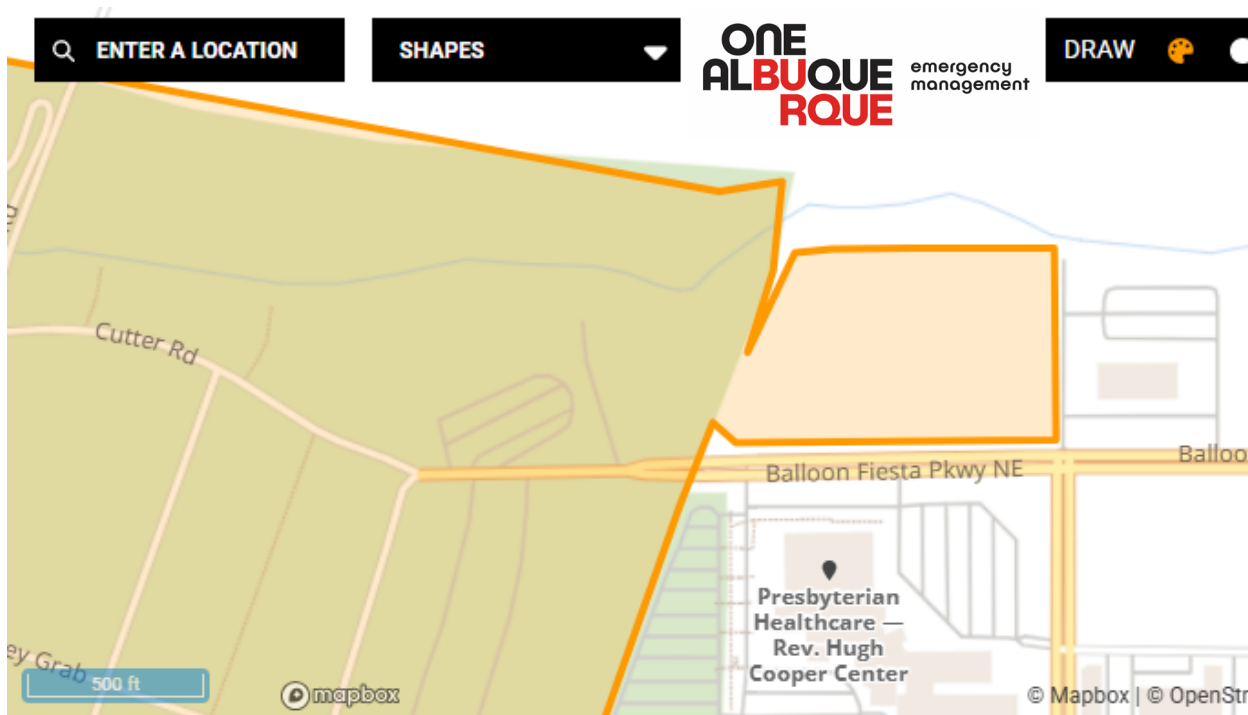


CABQ Office of Emergency Management has the capability to target messaging in emergent situations. This capability is known as “geofencing” and can be done quickly.

- Geofencing = digital technology that establishes virtual boundaries around an area designated by the OEM staff. Once this boundary is established, cellular devices in those area are sent text alerts to the situation in their area without disturbing residents outside of the boundary.

Use of this capability is by OEM and determined by their standard operating procedures.

- Note: This is an OEM / Public Safety option in a different, specific system



Summary



- EHD's Health Alerts platforms are "Opt -in"
- EHD has a proactive stance on public health outreach and education
- EHD becomes secondary in emergent situations, such as fires, but collaborates with the leading agency as appropriate
 - Communications are determined by the incident commander from the lead agency



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Questions?