National Academies
Wildfire Smoke Health Impacts Workshop
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Propositions, not assertions of fact:

1. The Ashland Forest Resiliency Project, its future projection in the Rogue Basin Strategy and the recent Almeda Fire and intense wildfire smoke intrusions that followed provide a significant conceptual context for applying the smoke science research discussed in this Workshop in state of the art wildfire prevention - both forest and urban - in a smoke sensitive area.

2.a The most recent State of Oregon Smoke Rules Review Committee process, which over a period of nearly two years, bridged from existing rules that were beginning to render AFR ineffectual by prohibiting the flexibility in prescribed burning needed to keep up with the burning of accumulated fuels and the rate of growth of new vegetation (i.e. "fuel") in the thinned forests created by the Project to.....

2.b The new rules created by staff for the Review Committee are better than the ones they replaced but also introduced new challenges to perform sufficient prescribed burning, etc. An exemption to a one hour exposure limit was fashioned and an application process created requiring a determination by the 'host' county's public health department that the applying entity (City of Ashland) had in place an adequate 'community smoke mitigation program' to compensate for potential smoke exposure resulting from more autonomous management of prescribed burning. (Ashland has had such a program in place for several years now - Smokewise Ashland.)

3. Balancing the health risks of smoke from prescribed burning against the risk of wildfires themselves that would have been prevented by thinning and its perpetual prescribed burning was improved, but ultimately still overly limited to provide the greatest safety for communities with high fire danger. .

4. The "Hazardous" AQI level smoke (and above) that followed the Almeda Fire was largely caused by other fires in Oregon and Northern

California, not the Almeda Fire itself, though short-term smoke from the Almeda Fire was particularly hazardous due to all the homes and businesses burning.

5. Scaling up the restoration forestry 'technology' from AFR to the Rogue Basin will ultimately result in the need to do multiple programs of prescribed burning within the same airshed ...which will require more sophisticated smoke prediction software and more coordinated interactions between burners and regulators, not to mention more attention to biomass utilization alternatives.

6. Disposing of "burn piles", i.e the thinned brush and accumulated fuels from the initial phase of restoration forestry, by burning will not work? At scale. A potential technological solution exists: high temperature (e.g. 2,000 degrees F) combustion, which produces biochar and very little smoke via air curtain burners.

7. The Governor of Oregon's Wildfire Council has developed a global strategy of performing fuel removal ('thinning' generalized) that applies scarce resources to protecting high value/risk targets: human settlements; community water resources; high likelihood ignition sites and fuel build-up along transportation infrastructure (highways, rail lines, utility maintenance access, etc.). This strategy, while born out of financial necessity also lends itself to management of smoke risks.

8. Future forestry wildfire prevention efforts are most vulnerable to loss of the wildfire fighting and fuels reduction workforce, which is also by far the most susceptible to the health risks of wildfire smoke.

9. The "answer" to managing the health effects of wildfire smoke lies not in creating more rules and permission processes but in better informing the prescribed burners.

10. Climate change is likely to make Paradise-style/Almeda-style high intensity forest and urban wildfire more commonplace and not the exception.