



Wildfire & Air Quality: Partner Resource Guide

Updated July 20, 2026 · Conditions change daily — always verify current status before sharing with guests

The Situation at a Glance

Duluth is open, and our hearts are with our neighbors to the north. The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) is under a full closure that began July 14. Over a dozen wildfires continue to burn in the Superior National Forest and BWCAW, with more than 70,000 acres burned, and communities in parts of St. Louis, Lake, and Cook Counties remain in evacuation readiness. The closure doesn't apply to the city of Duluth, and our messaging holds a balance between the fact that we're open to welcome visitors and that we care deeply about the northern communities experiencing closures.

The more immediate issue for visitors here in Duluth is smoke. Air quality across the Twin Ports and North Shore has been affected for over a week, at times reaching hazardous levels. Conditions shift quickly with the wind, and shoreline areas can lag behind inland areas in clearing because the lake traps smoke at the surface. There's no confirmed clean-air date, so it is advised that partners and guests check conditions each morning rather than assuming a return-to-normal date.

Some Duluth-area events have been canceled or postponed due to air quality (we've shared these on our Stories and will continue to do so), so ensure that you confirm a specific event or venue is operating before recommending it.

Key Messages for Guests

- Hold both truths. "The BWCAW is closed" is not "Duluth is closed." Duluth is open and welcoming visitors, and we're thinking of our neighbors to the north who are navigating the fires directly. Lead with care, not dismissal.
- Share today's status and check each morning. Conditions have improved from last week's worst days but continue to change daily. Check the resources below before quoting an air quality status.
- Flag higher-risk guests. Anyone with respiratory or heart conditions, older adults, young children, and pregnant guests may want to consult their care provider for health-related information.
- Offer an indoor option, not just a cancellation. If a guest still wants to come, point them to indoor experiences so a cancellation becomes a modified visit instead.

A blog will launch this week featuring indoor-only experiences.

Health & Safety Notes You Can Share

- For anyone spending time outside, recommend an N95 mask. Cloth and surgical masks don't filter smoke particles effectively.

- Indoors: keep windows closed and run AC or an air purifier on recirculate where available.
- Be direct and transparent with higher-risk guests (asthma, heart or lung conditions, pregnancy, young kids, older adults) about elevated AQI days, but it is imperative you don't offer health advice and tell them to seek information from their healthcare provider.

Where to Check Current Conditions

Bookmark these and check daily before sharing status updates with guests.

What to check	Where
Real-time AQI map	www.airnow.gov
MN air quality alerts (MPCA)	www.pca.state.mn.us
Smoke timing & daily forecast (NWS Duluth)	www.weather.gov/dlh/weatherstory
BWCAW closure status & maps	www.fs.usda.gov/r09/superior/alerts
Fire incident details (InciWeb)	inciweb.wildfire.gov