

All smoke, no mirrors

SARAH COEFIELD

MISSOULA CITY-COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Air quality
specialist
communication
responsibilities

Daily updates

Media inquiries

Public
inquiries/meetings

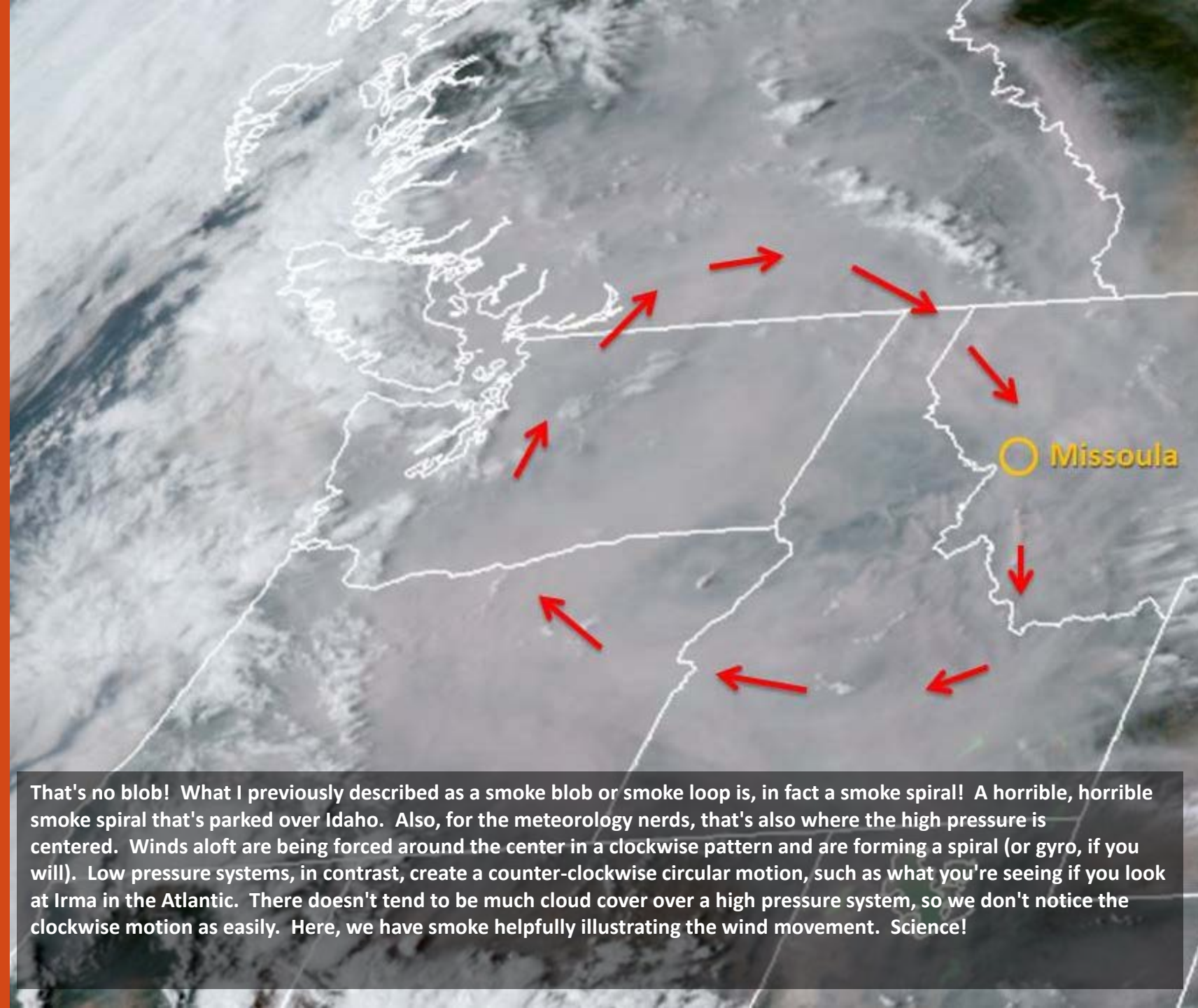
Daily updates

Compile weather data, smoke data, fire activity information, and health advisories, then push out a message that brings it all together with a clear message that incorporates maps, photos and dumb smoke jokes.

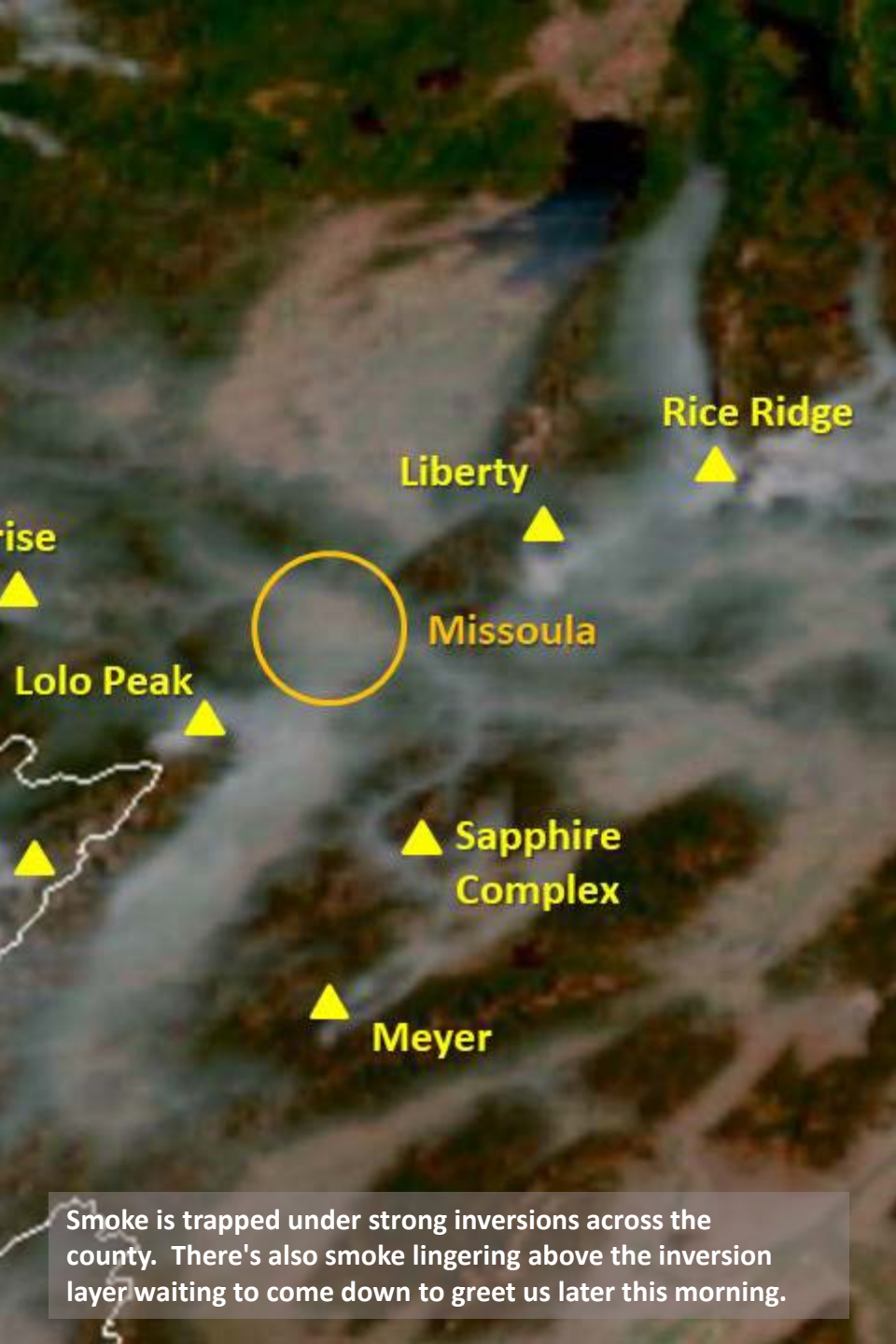
Updates issued generally twice per day.

Each update takes ~2 hours.

More than 73K works written in 2017.



That's no blob! What I previously described as a smoke blob or smoke loop is, in fact a smoke spiral! A horrible, horrible smoke spiral that's parked over Idaho. Also, for the meteorology nerds, that's also where the high pressure is centered. Winds aloft are being forced around the center in a clockwise pattern and are forming a spiral (or gyro, if you will). Low pressure systems, in contrast, create a counter-clockwise circular motion, such as what you're seeing if you look at Irma in the Atlantic. There doesn't tend to be much cloud cover over a high pressure system, so we don't notice the clockwise motion as easily. Here, we have smoke helpfully illustrating the wind movement. Science!



Smoke is trapped under strong inversions across the county. There's also smoke lingering above the inversion layer waiting to come down to greet us later this morning.

One message, multiple audiences

Direct email list includes media outlets, schools, daycares, government officials and the interested public

- Media frequently pulls quotes from the updates or directly posts the updates online
- Schools and daycares use the updates to plan outside activity around the smoke

All updates are also posted online and shared on social media (Facebook).

Media inquiries

More than 70 media appearances
stemmed from interviews

- Radio, print and camera
- Local and national outlets (NYT, Washington Post, NPR, AP, etc.)



Wildfire Smoke Takes Physical, Mental Toll On Western Montana

By EDWARD O'BRIEN • AUG 25, 2017



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A plane flies over the Rice Ridge Fire near Seeley Lake, MT, August 8, 2017.

INCIWEB

What went well?

Audience continued to broaden throughout the season.

Stayed on message throughout the fire season.

Many members of the public took key message to heart.

Dumb smoke jokes remained popular throughout the season.



Monday's Montanan: Coefield keeps air quality alerts entertaining

From the Monday's Montanans are making a difference series

PETER FRIESEN peter.friesen@missoulia.com Aug 13, 2017

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"In 2015, I was getting nervous 'cause I was running out of dumb smoke jokes. That is a concern, 'cause this fire season's going to be a long one," Sarah Coefield said, referring to the current air quality around Missoula County. The air quality specialist has been monitoring the air in Missoula County for the Missoula City-County Health Department for seven years.

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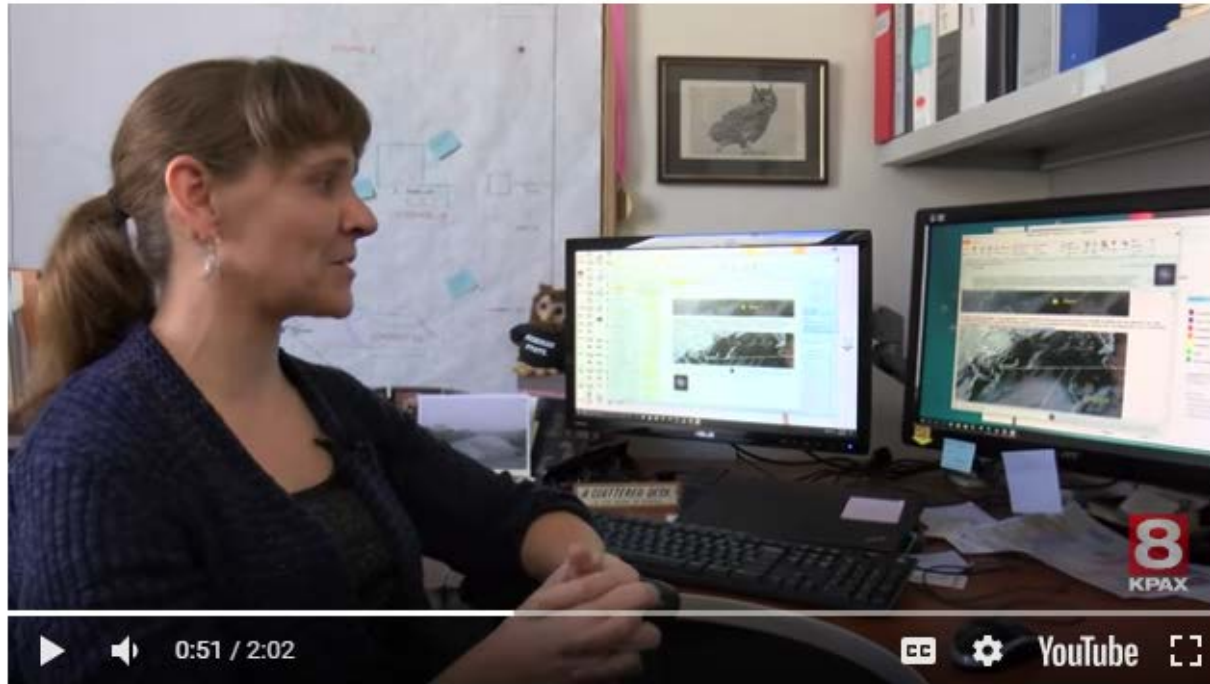
RECOMMENDED

Unexpected
small town
celebrity status!

Humor a bittersweet touch for Missoula air quality specialist

© Posted: Sep 26, 2017 5:22 PM MDT

By Augusta McDonnell **CONNECT**



MISSOULA - As we talked about air quality this summer, there were not a lot of positive things to say.

Despite the depressing outlook, a [Missoula City-County Health Department](#) air quality specialist took it upon herself to find humor in a smoky situation.

Unexpected
small town
celebrity status!

Outlook • Perspective

Montana residents are desperate for clean air, and they're calling me

My job is to manage air quality. This fire season, I'm just trying to help people breathe.



In an Sept. 1, 2017 photo, smoke from the Rice Ridge Fire blankets the town of Seeley Lake, Mont. The air quality in Seeley Lake had hourly pollution readings classified as hazardous in 26 days in August. (Rion Sanders/AP)



By Sarah Coefield September 15, 2017

Sarah Coefield is an air quality specialist with the Missoula City-County Health Department. She is a native Montanan.

MISSOULA, Mont.

Unexpected
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celebrity status!



Most significant challenge: Seeley Lake and smoke from the Rice Ridge Fire

Possibly the worst wildfire smoke event in U.S., both in duration and intensity

35 mornings of Hazardous air quality



**Recommendations for Seeley Lake Residents to Avoid Smoke
Unprecedented High Levels of Harmful Air Pollution from Wildfires
Issued August 9, 2017**

The Missoula City-County Health Department is issuing stronger recommendations for Seeley Lake residents to avoid the dangerous wildfire smoke in the community. Recent air monitoring readings show record levels of harmful wildfire smoke in Seeley Lake. Indoor air is not safe. The smoke that is outside is also inside the buildings.

The recommendations are for everyone, but they are especially important for groups with higher health risk from breathing smoke: infants, children, pregnant women, people with asthma, lung or heart disease, and everyone 65 and older.

- Spend as little as time in the Seeley Lake area as possible.
 - If you must be in Seeley Lake during the day, leave the area at night. The worst smoke is gathering overnight and is entering buildings.
 - Consider moving at-risk family members out of the area
 - If you do not have anywhere to go, the Red Cross has set up a shelter in the Potomac Valley. Anyone seeking to stay at the shelter may call the Red Cross of Montana at 1800-272-6668.

Call to leave Seeley Lake

Media interpretations varied

While technically accurate, media's use of the term "evacuation" produced heartache with the incident command team and members of the public

News & Features

Health Officials Recommend Seeley Lake Evacuations Due to Smoke

Seeley Lake registered air pollution levels Thursday morning 38 times above what the World Health Organization says is safe

BY MATT VOLZ, ASSOCIATED PRESS // AUG 10, 2017

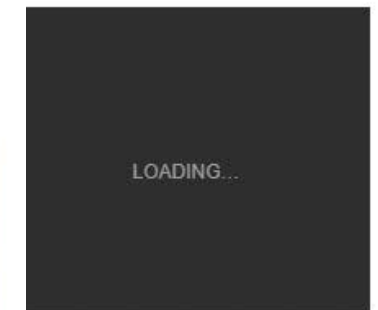


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Smoke



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Additional Challenges

Finding adequate health messages for the smoke levels we saw and the duration of the smoke event.

Long and exhausting season (regular updates July 21-September 19).

Only so many hours in a day

- Issue updates
- Respond to media inquiries
- Respond to inquiries from the public
- Attend staff-level meetings
- Attend public meetings
- Coordinate air purifier distribution effort (Come to my talk Thursday afternoon!)