

October 29, 2021

Governor Kate Brown
900 Court Street NE, Suite 254
Salem, Oregon 97301

Governor Jay Inslee
PO Box 40002
Olympia, WA

Governor Gavin Newsom
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Brown, Governor Inslee, and Governor Newsom,

We are writing on behalf of migrant and seasonal agricultural workers and H-2A temporary guest workers, farmworker advocates, and allies to express our strong desire to create a Western States Pact approach for excessive heat and wildfire smoke standards. Over recent years, farmworkers have been facing the effects of climate change as they labor through wildfires, heatwaves, and more. We recognize and appreciate the efforts made by each state to address the extreme weather conditions that workers face. At the same time, we are concerned that the content of the rules vastly differs from each other which will certainly lead to confusion for farmworkers who work in multiple states. We also appreciate the precedent that has been established through the Pacific Coast Collaborative (PCC) and the COVID-19 Western States Pact to cooperate on addressing issues such as climate change that affect the states of California, Oregon, and Washington. The Western States Pact approach will not only create a set of consistent standards and minimize confusion amongst workers, but it will also serve as a catalyst for national heat and smoke standards since we know that these issues extend beyond the West Coast states. The Western States Pact for heat and smoke will improve health outcomes of farmworkers by preventing death, heat-illness, and respiratory issues.

Farmworkers are particularly vulnerable to the dangers of heat stress due to the environmental conditions and physical exertion involved in agricultural work. The effects of heat stress range from heat exhaustion and heat rash to heatstroke and death. Heat stress may also lead to disabling and potentially fatal kidney problems. Despite the widespread nature of the risk, many farmworkers lack sufficient training and knowledge on how to prevent and respond to heat stress and heat-related illness.

Wildfire smoke has also emerged as a growing threat to the health of agricultural workers, as climate change causes longer and more pronounced droughts. The acreage burned in the states of California, Oregon and Washington increased five-fold between 2016 and 2020, from 1.21 to 6.08 million acres. These wildfires release large amounts of fine particulate matter (PM 2.5) into the air. Exposure to high concentrations of fine particles is associated with health problems such as heart attacks, irregular heartbeat, aggravated asthma, decreased lung function, and increased respiratory symptoms. There is also scientific evidence indicating that exposure to particulate matter and smoke from biomass burning is associated with increased susceptibility to respiratory viruses.

Given the urgency of ensuring that farmworkers are better protected against the growing health threat of heat stress and wildfire smoke, states should not wait for the federal OSHA to act before adopting a set of consistent permanent standards. Although the agency is planning to issue an Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking in October to begin the process of developing a heat stress standard, the development of a federal heat stress standard will be a lengthy process with no guarantee of success.

In view of the uncertainty concerning the adoption of a heat stress standard at the federal level, the most expeditious and effective way to protect migratory farmworkers in the face of mounting threats posed by climate change and increasingly frequent heat waves and wildfires are for the states of California, Oregon, and Washington to adopt consistent standards for heat stress and smoke protections.

It is undeniable that immigrant, BIPOC, lower-wage, and non-union workers will continue to be disproportionately harmed by our warming world, and older, more health-vulnerable populations will be disproportionately impacted by heat and smoke. Based on the current standards within each respective state, there is room for improvement to ensure farmworkers are protected from excessive heat and wildfire smoke exposure. Ultimately, the rules should eliminate workplace deaths and minimize the number of illnesses and injuries. Through this pact, we ask that each governor direct their respective state agency--Oregon OSHA, Washington DOSH, and Cal/OSHA--to adopt consistent heat and smoke standards with strong enforcement ahead of the 2022 summer harvest season.

Sincerely,

California

Alliance Medical Center
California Institute for Rural Studies
California Primary Care Association
Center for Environmental Health
Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment

Marin Community Clinics
Marked By COVID
North Bay Jobs with Justice
Parable of the Sower Intentional Community
Cooperative

Petaluma Health Center
Physicians for Social Responsibility/Sacramento
Real Food Media
Vision y Compromiso
Watsonville Law Center
Worksafe

Oregon

BlueGreen Alliance Oregon
Climate Solutions Oregon
Fair World Project
Farm Worker Ministry Northwest
Health Care Without Harm
Micronesia Islander Community
Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides
Oregon Academy of Family Physicians
Oregon AFL-CIO
Oregon AFSCME Council 75
Oregon Center for Public Policy
Oregon Climate and Agriculture Network
Oregon Environmental Council
Oregon Food Bank
Oregon Just Transition Alliance
Oregon League of Conservation Voters
Oregon Nurses Association
Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility
Oregon Public Health Association
PCUN
Renew Oregon
Rural Organizing Project
Safe Jobs Oregon COSH
Self & SoulWork
Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Center
Voz Workers' Rights Education Project

Washington

BASTA Coalition of Washington
BlueGreen Alliance Washington
Chelan-Douglas Health District
Chicano
Climate Solutions Washington
Community Health Network of Washington
Community Health Plan of Washington
Community to Community Development

Duwamish River Cleanup Coalition
Familias Unidas Por La Justicia
Family Health Centers
Front and Centered
IBEW 46
Immigrant & Latinx Solidarity Group
Latinos en Okanogan
Latinos Promoting Good Health
Mason County Climate Justice
NCW Equity Alliance
Parque Padrinos
Puget Sound Sage
Shalom TCIC
Strengthening Sanctuary Alliance
SW Washington LULAC Council 47013
Tri-Cities Immigrant Coalition
Washington Immigrant Solidarity Group
Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility
Western Environmental Law Center

Regional

Earthjustice, Northwest Office
Northwest Regional Primary Care Association
The Next Door, Inc.
Western Environmental Law Center

National

Center for Biological Diversity
Center for Environmental Health
Farmworker Justice
FHI 360
Food & Water Watch
Friends of the Earth
Health Outreach Partners
Migrant Clinicians Network
National COSH
NCFH
Science and Environmental Health Network
United Farm Workers
United Farm Workers Foundation

Other States

Venceremos (AR)
Farmworker Association of Florida
Fair Housing Organization (ID)
Idaho Immigrant Resource Alliance
Idaho Organization of Resource Councils
Immigrant Justice Idaho
Latinx Farmworkers of Southern Idaho
Northbound Commons (ID)
PODER of Idaho
Visión 2C Resource Council (ID)

Chicago Jobs with Justice (IL)
Eagle View Community Health System (IL)
Warehouse Workers for Justice (IL)
Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments (MD)
La Semilla Food Center (NM)
Alianza Agrícola (NY)
Food Chain Workers Alliance (NY)
Worker Justice Center of NY
Workers Center of Central New York
Cincinnati Interfaith Worker Center (OH)

Individuals

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Alondra (OR)
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Amber Tafoya (WA)
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Meg Gomez (WA)
Melinda Strnad (OR)
Melissa (WA)
Michael Heumann (OR)
Mikaela Freundlich (WA)

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Molly Parker (WA)
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Natalia Tocino (CA)
Neshani Jani (CA)
Obdulia Munoz (OR)
Pamela Nell (CA)
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Ramon Everson (WA)
Rayne Schwantes (OR)
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