



Forest Service protects air quality, educates new generations of students

Andrea Nick from the US Forest Service Air Program visited a school in the rural town of Prairie City, CA near the Malheur National Forest.

Prairie City, a town of 2,000 citizens, is facing a fire of over 100,000 acres known as the Canyon Creek Complex. Prairie City and other surrounding towns experienced high levels of smoke for several days.

As part of its effort to establish a smoke monitor in the area, the school principal asked the Forest Service to give a scientific talk at the school during which students could learn about an important reality affecting their community.

During an entire day, Andrea Nick educated 120 students from

kindergarten to grade 12 about the impacts of smoke on their community. She and her teammate Chuck Stanley, explained to the students the steps they can take to protect themselves

against smoke. As Andrea mentioned, “it was something completely new for the children. They used to think it is smoky day because there is fire but didn’t know all the implications behind that.”



Figure 1 Andrea Nick, a Forest Service air quality specialist, teaching children in a classroom



Figure 2 EBAM smoke monitor in school

The greatest challenge, Andrea said, was to provide the children with a scientific explanation of the impacts of smoke on their bodies. “To the youngest children, I asked them if they could think of something really small, and they said an ant, I said, well, something even smaller than that.”

The students enjoyed learning about and seeing the EBAM, one of the instruments that the Air Program uses to monitor the smoke in the area.

For Andrea, it was also a rewarding experience to make people aware that there is information available for them and that, now, they can better decide whether to avoid going outside when there is smoke.

In the past, there was no one who could answer these questions. “A lady came to me and thanked us for the educational presentation. She told me that her husband had to leave the town because he had COPD,” said Andrea. The information shared by both Chuck Stanley and Andrea Nick allowed her husband to protect his health and helped them decide when it was safe to

return home with his health condition.

As this new generation of youth from Prairie City is learning about the consequences of smoke, the Air Program hopes that they can protect their health in the future.