



# COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

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## PRESS RELEASE

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### N-95 DISTRIBUTION TO FARMWORKERS

As air quality continues to be in the “unhealthy” to the “hazardous” range of the Air Quality Index (AQI), the Santa Cruz County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is working in coordination with the Santa Cruz County Agricultural Commissioner to distribute N-95 masks to protect essential farmworkers.

With harvest season underway, the County distributed 15,000 N-95 masks to farms for the protection of farmworkers during initial phases of the Lightning Complex Fires. With air quality issues throughout the County expected to persist for the duration of the fire, the County ordered an additional 27,000 and has begun distribution of those as well.

“My office has been distributing N-95 masks to growers to keep their ag workers safe,” said Agricultural Commissioner, Juan Hidalgo. “Despite a scarcity of mask supplies due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we sought and secured additional resources in response to the fires to help protect our essential workers from air pollution.”

“Our agricultural workers are at greater risk of smoke exposure as they often have no option but to work outdoors,” said Tamara Vides, assistant city manager for the city of Watsonville. “We are pleased to support the County and work with them in assuring the health of our farmworkers is protected.”

As part of the mask distribution, the Agricultural Commissioner is also providing information for growers. Growers are required to provide protective face coverings to farmworkers once the AQI reaches 151, or the “unhealthy range,” and should continue to monitor air quality and their own supplies to assure compliance with Department of Industrial Relations standards should air quality reach unhealthy levels.

KN-95 masks are not adequate in protecting farmworkers from smoke particulate pollution. If the current AQI is less than 151, farmworkers may use filtering facepiece respirators (dust masks).