



Clean Air Day 2026

Engagement Guide

This Engagement guide is intended for individuals, communities, organizations, youth groups, educators, and partners interested in hosting Clean Air Day or year-round air quality events. This guide includes essential resources, information, and event dates to support participation in Clean Air Day in Canada and year-round environmental engagement and air quality events. This guide is available [online](#).

This report has been produced by Mahihkan Management, an Indigenous owned business specializing in Indigenous engagements and events in partnership with Health Canada. Culturally and ethnically diverse, Mahihkan works with contractors representing many cultures, including Indigenous Peoples, and has worked in collaboration with the government and Indigenous led organizations to deliver engagements within B.C. and across Canada.



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Why Clean Air Matters

Clean air is essential to the health, wellbeing, and quality of life of communities across Turtle Island. For Indigenous Peoples, relationships with air, land, water, and all living beings are deeply interconnected and rooted in longstanding knowledge systems, cultural practices, and responsibilities to future generations.

Indigenous communities continue to experience a disproportionate burden of health and environmental impacts associated with poor air quality. These inequities are shaped by past and ongoing colonial policies and practices, including dispossession of traditional territories, forced relocation, and systemic barriers to adequate housing, infrastructure, and healthcare. The intergenerational impacts of these conditions are reflected in higher rates of overcrowded and substandard housing, poverty, and chronic health conditions. Poor indoor and outdoor air quality can exacerbate these challenges, particularly for children, Elders, and those with pre-existing respiratory conditions.

Indigenous communities continue to demonstrate leadership, resilience, and innovation in protecting and improving air quality. Time spent on the land, cultural continuity, strong kinship and community relationships, Indigenous languages, and expressions of self-determination act as protective factors that support health, resilience, and environmental stewardship. Indigenous-led initiatives in air monitoring, land stewardship, climate adaptation, and knowledge-sharing are vital to creating healthier futures.

This Engagement Guide was developed to support Indigenous communities, organizations, and partners in participating in Clean Air Day and advancing year-round action on air quality. It is intended as a practical resource that brings together information, ideas, and opportunities for community-led engagement while supporting communities to honour their own Indigenous knowledge systems and community priorities. Clean Air Day provides an opportunity to raise awareness, celebrate collective action, and strengthen commitments to protecting the air we share, today and for generations to come.



What is Clean Air Day?

Air surrounds us and makes life possible. In Canada, the first Wednesday in June has been recognised as Clean Air Day since 1999 to raise awareness about how essential clean air is for health and the environment. This invites individuals, communities and organisations to learn about air quality and the action to protect and improve it through events and activities. While Clean Air Day serves as an important focal point, these actions are not limited to a single day, they can be practiced, promoted, and incorporated throughout the year to create lasting impact.

Air quality refers to how free the air is from harmful pollutants. Even though Canada's air is generally among the cleanest in the world, air pollution still affects both our health and environment. Pollutants can come from human activities such as burning fossil fuels for transportation, electricity and industrial processes, as well as natural sources like wildfires, dust and pollen.

Poor air quality has serious consequences. In Canada, air pollution is linked to around 17,400 premature deaths per year and costs an estimated \$146 billion annually in health impacts and lost productivity. Air pollution can increase your risk of heart and lung diseases, stroke, lung cancer, and other health problems even at low levels of exposure. It also harms wildlife, vegetation and crops, and contributes to broader environmental challenges such as biodiversity loss and climate change.

Clean air is not only vital for human health, it also supports thriving ecosystems, stronger communities and a more sustainable future. Recognizing the importance of clean air through initiatives like Clean Air Day encourages us all to understand where pollution comes from, to reduce emissions, and to make choices that protect the air we share with others and with generations to come.

Across Turtle Island, communities and organisations are coming together to host ceremonies, participate in activities and demonstrate their commitment to celebrating and improving the air we share.

Mahihkan Management is dedicated to protecting the air we breathe through our advocacy and policy work. We have also worked with communities across Turtle Island to offer resources and events. This year we encourage you to celebrate Clean Air Day by taking part in events or organizing your own.



Sources of Air Pollution

Understanding where air pollution comes from helps communities make informed decisions, advocate for healthier environments, and protect those most vulnerable to poor air quality, including children, Elders, and people with chronic health conditions.

Provided below are many of Canada's major outdoor and indoor air pollutants,. This is not all inclusive, as society progresses other outdoor air pollutants may exist or arise.

Outdoor Sources

Traffic-related

Traffic-related air pollution is a mixture of pollutants from tire and brake wear, vehicle exhaust, other particles such as road dust and evaporation of fuels from engine components. The socioeconomic cost of health impact of traffic-related air pollution is estimated at \$9.5B per year and contributes to 1,200 premature deaths, 210,000 asthma symptom days and 2.7 million acute respiratory symptom days.

Industry and Construction

Industrial activities, oil and gas development, construction and manufacturing contribute major outdoor pollutants including sulphur oxides, nitrogen oxides, fine particulate matter and volatile organic compounds. These emissions are tracked under the Government of Canada's National Pollutant Release Inventory and measured in national air quality reports. In some Indigenous communities, such as the Aamjiwnaang First Nation near "Chemical Valley" the proximity to petrochemical facilities has caused serious air quality concerns. The federal government has taken action to impose pollution controls, including benzene limits in partnership with Indigenous leadership to protect health and the environment.

Wildfires and Smoke

Canada's changing climate provides ideal conditions for increased wildfires that typically occur early April to late October. Wildfire smoke from forests and grasslands are a major source of air pollution and may be carried thousands of kilometres from the fire zone, negatively impacting air quality.

Wildfire smoke is a mixture of gases, particles and water vapour, but it is the particles, not visible to the human eye, that have been linked to many health symptoms. There is not known safe level of exposure for some of these pollutants. This means that smoke can impact your health even at very low levels. As smoke level increase, your health risk increases. Air quality may be poor even if you can't see or smell smoke.

Approximately 7000 wildfires occur each year in Canada burning on average of 2.7M ha per year with around 50% caused by lightning strikes that are usually in remote areas. 2023 was an unprecedented year with approximately 15 million ha burned. In 2025 8.3 million ha burned with 85,000 evacuated, this included 45,000 people from 73 First Nations Communities.



Sources of Air Pollution

Indoor Air Sources

A [First Nations indoor air quality study](#) examined the relationship between indoor air quality and lower respiratory tract infections (like bronchiolitis and pneumonia), asthma and skin infections in children of 3 years or less living on reserve. First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples experience a disproportionate burden of chronic respiratory diseases, such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, compared to non-Indigenous people, and these diseases can become exacerbated by poor air quality. Higher rates of respiratory infections, such as bronchitis, bronchiolitis, pneumonia, and tuberculosis, are also reported for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children. While children living in the First Nations communities of the Sioux Lookout zone, a group of mainly remote, fly-in communities in North-western Ontario, the rate of lower respiratory tract infection is much higher than the Canadian average.

Cooking

[Particulate matter](#) is one of the more harmful contaminants that affect indoor air quality. People in many communities including those with older or poorly ventilated housing can be especially exposed.

Cleaning Products and Fragrances

Chemical products used for cleaning and odour control can release VOCs and other pollutants indoors. While commercial products may contain harmful compounds, traditional Indigenous practices often rely on natural plants including cedar, sweetgrass and sage that do not degrade indoor air quality in the same way.

Mould and Dampness

Poor housing conditions due to systemic underfunding contributes to issues of mould and dampness. [Indoor Air Safety](#) lists mould as a common indoor air hazard that can significantly impact respiratory health.

Poor Ventilation

Many homes lack good ventilation, which allows indoor pollutants to build up. The Government of Canada [Air Quality](#) notes that because Canadians spend about 90% of time indoors, both outdoor pollutions infiltrating indoor spaces and indoor sources significantly affect exposure and health.

Pollutants can come from indoor burning if ventilation is poor. It's important to distinguish everyday indoor smoke from ceremonial use, such as smudging, which carries deep cultural and spiritual meaning and is practised respectfully with adequate ventilation.

What Does Clean Air Mean for Your Community?

Clean Air Day in Canada will be held on **Wednesday, June 3, 2026.**

Guiding Questions for Community Reflection

These questions may be used in sharing circles with knowledge holders and community champions:

1. What teachings, practices, or stories help guide how we care for the air in our community?

2. How does clean air support our daily lives, cultural practices, and time on the land? How are these activities affected when air quality is poor?

3. Are there memories, stories or experiences either past or present that remind us why clean air matters?

4. How have changes to the land, climate, or environment affected the air we breathe?

5. What responsibilities do we hold, individually and collectively to protect clean air for future generations?

Clean air is experienced differently across territories, cultures, and generations. We invite communities to centre their Clean Air Day activities on reflecting what clean air means in their own place, language, and lived experience. Talking circles, knowledge-sharing, storytelling, art, media, and intergenerational dialogue can help highlight both the importance of clean air and the shared responsibility to protect it for future generations.

Clean Air Day 2026 will feature an interactive and engaging a virtual Indigenous **Knowledge and Engagement Workshop**. Event details and registration will be announced soon. Organizations can also access a full kit of free, ready-to-use participation resources on the [Clean Air Day webpage](#).

Planning Your Clean Air Day Event

Hosting a Clean Air Day event is a great way to engage your community in learning about the importance of clean air and actions to protect it for future generations. Events can be small or large scale, virtual or in person, educational or celebratory. These ideas below are intended as inspiration for communities to adapt for capacity, priorities and protocols.

Promoting Your Event

If you're planning something small, share your efforts with the Clean Air Day community online by using the hashtags #CleanAirDay and #CleanAirEverywhere. Post photos, reflections, and stories to inspire others to take part in clean air initiatives.

For larger events, Mahihkan is here to help you promote your gathering with customizable posters, social media assets, and outreach support. Reach out to our team to have your event listed on our website and shared within broader networks.

Additionally, consider:

1. Local Media Outreach

Connect with community radio stations, newsletters, or newspapers to share event details.

2. Community Bulletin Boards & Flyers

Distribute posters in high-traffic areas like band offices, schools, and health centres.

3. Partnerships

Collaborate with local schools, environmental groups, and cultural organizations to co-host activities and expand outreach.

Organizations and communities can access digital materials, including posters, banners, and infographics, to promote Clean Air Day on websites, social media platforms, and within their local networks. These materials are customizable to reflect regional priorities and cultural perspectives and are available on the Mahihkan website.

By centering your event around community-led priorities and values, Clean Air Day becomes a powerful opportunity to celebrate, educate, and take action together in a way that aligns with your community's unique identity and aspirations.

Planning Considerations



To ensure your Clean Air Day aligns with your community's values, traditions, and protocols and cultural identity and local priorities. This could include:

Protocols and Elders

If your community follows specific protocols for gatherings, ensure that they are respected. You may consider:

- Beginning the event with a traditional welcome.
- Land acknowledgement.
- A prayer led by an Elder or Knowledge Keeper.
- Offerings to Elders.
- Inviting specific speakers first.

Fire Safety, Smoke Awareness and Community Preparedness

Wildfires and controlled burns are increasingly shaping air quality across Turtle Island. While fire has been a part of Indigenous land stewardship and cultural practice, climate change has intensified wildfire frequency and smoke exposure, creating new health and safety risks for communities.

When planning Clean Air Day or air quality-related events, it is important to consider fire safety, smoke considerations and community preparedness. Key considerations for your event include monitoring Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) and wildfire updates leading up to your event, having flexible plans for moving outdoor events indoor or online if smoke levels are unsafe, and ensure Elders, children, those that are pregnant and individuals with respiratory conditions have safe spaces and options to participate.

Smoke aware event practices may include the following:

- Stay up to date with air quality in communities by referring to the [Air Quality Health Index](#).
- Health Canada recommends [masks](#) that are well-fitting and properly worn NIOSH-certified N95 or equivalent respirator KN95 or KF94 mask.
- Share information on recognizing smoke-related health symptoms.
- Identify emergency contacts and evacuation routes if hosting in person events.
- Ensure event organisers and volunteers know safety procedures.
- Follow local fire bans, restrictions and community guidance at all times.
- Offer rest areas with clean air circulation when possible.
- Utilise [portable air cleaners](#).
- Refer to guidance during [wildfire smoke events](#).
- Acknowledge fire as both a sacred tool and a modern risk and invite Knowledge Keepers to share local fire teaching, protocols and responsibilities.



Event Ideas for Inspiration and Planning

The engagement approaches below have been included as examples of how to engage your community in a purposeful way through utilizing storytelling, learning, creativity and action, while centring indigenous knowledge and intergenerational connection. These can be offered in virtual, in-person or hybrid formats.

Youth and Family Engagement

- Organise storytelling circles or workshops designed for youth and families.
- Offer creative activities such as painting, crafts, photography or digital art that explore the meaning of clean air.
- Host movement-based activities such as dancing, with drumming and singing, allowing space for movement as medicine and connection.
- Provide age-appropriate activities such as scavenger hunts, observation walks, science experiments or downloadable activity sheets.
- Invite families to participate in a Clean Air Pledge, committing to small, achievable actions together.

Community Action and Stewardship

- Highlight Indigenous language related to air, wind, weather and seasonal change through signage, teaching and discussion.
- Share teachings about traditional ecological knowledge, including how plants, animals, and weather patterns respond to air quality.
- Feature local histories and practices related to air, such as cultural fire stewardship, seasonal wind patterns, or community experiences with industrial impacts.
- Centre local protocols and teachings when discussing fire, smoke and land stewardship.

Storytelling and Knowledge Sharing

- Host sharing circles or facilitated conversations with Knowledge Keepers and Elders on the meaning of clean air.
- Invite discussions on lived experiences, personal stories and traditional teachings related to air, land and wellbeing.
- Develop storytelling projects where participants share written reflections, short videos or audio recordings expressing their relationship with clean air.
- Encourage dialogue that connects past teaching with present day experiences and future responsibility.

Learning, Awareness and Education

- Host educational sessions, speaker series, or webinars on air quality, climate change and Indigenous perspectives.
- Share accessible educational materials such as infographics, short videos and community-developed teachings.
- Organise film screenings or media viewings focused on air quality or environmental health, followed by facilitated discussions.
- Integrate Indigenous knowledge alongside scientific and policy-based information.

Community Action and Stewardship Participation

- Launch community challenges focussed on protecting clean air, such as reducing vehicle use, planting trees, or supporting clean energy.
- Create shared spaces for community members to exchange ideas, initiatives and local solutions.
- Support activities such as tree planting, stewardship projects, or time-on-the-land gatherings and outdoor activities or time on the land activities honouring air.
- Encourage community-led air monitoring indoor and outdoor, observation, or documentation of air quality changes with air monitoring and data collection training.
- Community emergency preparedness and smoke awareness sessions.

2026 Event Calendar

The Event Calendar highlights upcoming Clean Air Day and year-round air quality events across Turtle Island. Events include in-person, virtual, and hybrid opportunities focused on land stewardship, youth engagement, education, training, and policy discussions. To ensure alignment with capacity and priorities these events are categorized by community and land-based events, training and capacity-building, youth and family focussed, and education, policy and advisory. Please note that if you are seeking events of a specific language, culture, or protocol, or would like support hosting a gathering, please contact Mahihkan at events6@mahihkan.ca

Community and Land Based Events

This includes tree planting, land stewardship projects, cultural fire stewardship gatherings and outdoor clean air celebrations.

- Commuter Challenge (June 2026): a national community and workplace initiative promoting low-emission transportation and clean air during Environment Week.
- First Nations Environmental Health Innovation Network: Nationwide web-based network that provides information to assist First Nation communities to participate in environmental health research and to address their environmental health concerns.

Training and Capacity-Building

This includes air monitoring and data collection training, environmental health workshops and community preparedness and safety sessions.

- Firesmart Canada Training: Wildfire risk reduction, smoke preparedness, and community resilience activities relevant to clean air.
- Air Quality: Health effects, research and data, air pollutants, emissions inventories, sustainability indicators.
- Peace Airshed Zone Association (PAZA): monitors the air quality of the Peace Airshed.
- Clean Air Strategic Alliance (Alberta): Workshops, multi-stakeholder forums and technical sessions on air quality planning and management.

Youth Focused

This includes youth-led programs, mentorship, skills development, activities, art and storytelling.

- Generation of Environmental Leaders Program (GELP): an initiative inviting 18-35 year old youth in Canada, Mexico and the United States to share their solutions to support communities and preserve our shared waters, lands and air.
- Youth Climate Corps BC (YCCBC): empowers 17-30 year olds with paid work and training for six months to build skills, projects and develop leadership skills for projects to reduce emissions that address climate crisis.



2026 Event Calendar: Education, Policy and Advisory

Conferences and forums, webinars and speaker series, and policy, planning and leadership discussions.

- Canadian Renewable Energy Association (CanREA) 2026: annual calendar of national and regional events from conferences and networking events relating to wind energy, solar and energy-storage sectors across Canada.
- SustainTech Conference (March 18 to 19, 2026, Delta Saskatoon Downtown): conference highlighting the latest environmental practices and technologies from industry, consultants and regulators.
- Together | Ensemble (May 19-20, 2026, Calgary): Canada's leading national conference on collaborating and accelerating progress on the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This year's theme is Mobilizing Local Action for Global Impact, bringing together intergenerational Indigenous people, youth, academia, government, business and community leaders.
- Climate Justice Summit (May 22-23, 2026, Toronto): Workshops and summit for uniting climate justice enthusiasts globally for climate action and environmental equity.
- Adaptation Canada 2026 (September 22-24, 2026, Toronto): conference on climate adaptation will bring together participants from diverse sectors and communities across Canadian sectors, communities and regions.
- International Conference on Environmental Meteorology and Pollution (November 9, 2026, Vancouver): research and policy conference held in addressing air pollution, climate systems and environmental governance to discuss the latest research and technological advancements in air quality monitoring, climate modeling and pollution control strategies.
- Conference Index (2026, 2027 and 2028): Environmental monitoring conferences across Canada.
- Climate Action Partnership: webinars hosted year-round, consulting related to clean air, climate and public spaces.
- The Pembina Institute: conferences, panels, workshops and webinars throughout the year relating to clean energy and environmental issues.
- Eco-Solar Home Tours (Calgary and Edmonton): Virtual or in-person eco solar home tours.

By participating in these events and utilizing the resources provided, organizations and individuals can actively contribute to promoting clean air and environmental sustainability within Indigenous communities across Canada.

Grants and Funding Opportunities

Funding programs often support multiple activities at once. A single Clean Air Day event may combine youth engagement, land stewardship, and training under one application.

To support community-led clean air and environmental projects, events and initiatives may be supported through funding opportunities listed below:

- EcoAction: enables freshwater sustainability and actions across Canada. EcoAction Stream 1 and 2 collective offer a minimum of \$25,000 to \$200,000.
- Indigenous Guardians: provides funding for Indigenous peoples with a greater opportunity to exercise responsibility in stewardship of their traditional lands, waters and ice. On the success of this pilot program the Government of Canada has provided an additional \$100 million until 2026.
- Science Horizons Youth Internship Program: provides up to \$25,000 in wage subsidies to employers across Canada to hire post-secondary graduates in the environmental sector. Internships span for 4 to 12 months and funding up to \$5000 for certification and training and job accessibility.
- Zero Emission Vehicle Infrastructure Program (ZEVIP): provides 50% of Total Project Costs up to a maximum of 2 million dollars per project focussing on EV charger deployment in public places, residential and workplaces.
- Environmental Damages Fund: \$255 million has been invested across 600 projects and continues to offer funding in four areas including restoration, environmental and quality improvement, research development and education and awareness.
- Innovative Communities Fund invests in strategic projects that build the economies of Atlantic Canada's communities.
- Northern Isolated Community Initiatives (NICI): supports food and agriculture-related public and private organisations for Inuit Nunangat including the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, Nunavut, Nunavik and Nunatsiavut with a budget of 15 million over three years.
- Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER): offers support to First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Northwest Territories to find and secure funding to modernise community buildings through the InSites Program.
- Ontario Community Environment Fund: supports community-based activities including shoreline cleanups, habitat restoration and tree planting with a minimum funding request of \$5000.
- Climate Change and Health Adaptive Program: to build capacity for climate change and health adaptation by funding community-designed and driven projects.

The funding listed above represents examples of available opportunities and is not an exhaustive list.

Support, Preferences and Accessibility

Mahihkan Management is here to support communities and organizations in planning, hosting, and promoting Clean Air Day and year-round air-quality events.

We recognize that each community has unique cultural protocols, language needs, and accessibility considerations.

When reaching out to Mahihkan, we encourage you to share your:

- preferred language(s) for communication;
- accessibility needs (mobility, sensory, virtual access, elders and youth support);
- community or cultural protocols to be respected;
- preferred language(s) for communication and materials;
- interest in Indigenous language translation or interpretation; and
- level of support requested for promotion, facilitation, planning and funding guidance.

Let's Work Together

Whether you are planning a small community event or larger regional gathering, Mahihkan Management is here to help. We can support event design, promotion, safety considerations, facilitation, and a culturally grounded engagement.

To request support, share your event or discuss language and accessibility needs please email us at events6@mahihkan.ca or visit our website at <https://mahihkan.ca>.

We look forward to supporting your community in celebrating and protecting the air we share.