

## One-quarter of young adults affected by smoke and fumes from recent wildfires say they'd think of moving

Majority say climate change is 'crisis' that needs immediate action; 10 per cent say it's hopeless

**August 22, 2023** – As fires threaten Kelowna and Yellowknife, the latter forcing the evacuation of 20,000, Canadians continue to experience a summer of smoke. And while seven-in-10 Canadians say this fire season has been terrible or worse than average in their province, the future looks more ominous and has some considering a move to avoid subsequent smoky summers.

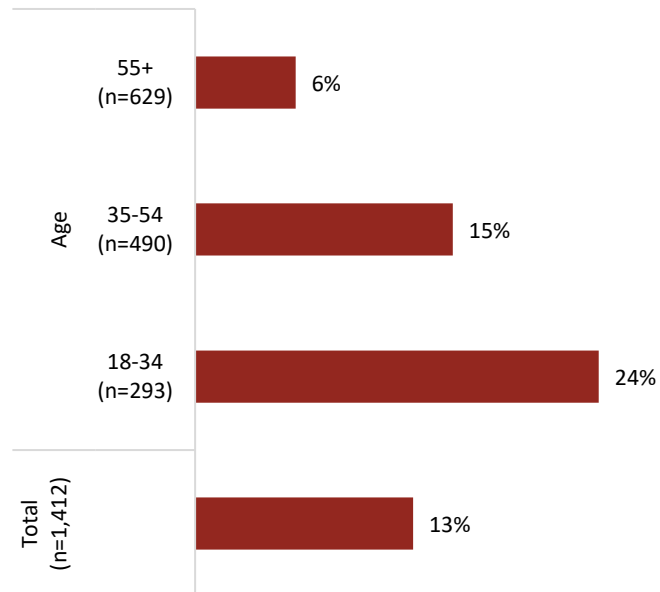
A new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds more than half of Canadians (55%) expecting even worse fire conditions in the future, while one-quarter (26%) say this year (a record-breaking year for fires itself) will be the new normal. Few have any hope for calmer summers to come.

For those affected by wildfires or smoke in the past five years, one-in-eight (13%) say they would consider relocating to a place that feels safer. Young adults say this is on their mind at higher rates (24%) than others as they consider where to set down roots and build their lives. Climate migration in Canada may be a new concept, but this research suggests it is on the minds of many.

Overall, Canadians are close to twice as likely to say that climate change is directly contributing to worsening fire seasons than not. Three-in-five (59%) hold this view, while one-in-three (33%) disagree.

While the machinations of daily life and how to cope with these environmental challenges hum along, existential questions ride alongside them for many Canadians. Three-in-five Canadians (63%) say that climate change represents a "crisis" that society must address urgently to overcome. One-in-10 (10%) believe the opportunity to act has already passed. Another group of one-in-nine Canadians (11%) – including one-

Percentage of those affected by smoke and fire in past five years who would consider relocating to avoid wildfires in the future



### METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted two online surveys for this project. One survey was fielded between Aug. 8-11, 2023 among a representative randomized sample of 1,606 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

Another study was fielded between July 26-31, 2023 among a representative randomized sample of 3,016 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 1.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The surveys were self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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quarter of past Conservative voters (24%) – say that nothing needs to be done and the situation is fine as it is.

### More Key Findings:

- Overall, nine-in-10 Canadians (89%) say that climate change is happening and not up for debate. That said, this group is partially divided into those who feel it is human caused (67%) or a natural cycle (22%).
- One-in-five (19%) in B.C. and one-in-six (16%) in Alberta who have been affected by smoke or fire in recent years say they are considering moving elsewhere to be less affected by wildfire seasons to come.
- The wildfires have directly threatened many regions of the country while the resulting smoke has had widespread impacts. One-in-five (20%) who have been touched by smoke this fire season say their health problems have worsened because of the poor air quality.

### About ARI

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

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#### Part One: As fires rage, Canadians see urgency in climate crisis

Before the end of summer, officials had already declared 2023 to be the [worst wildfire season ever recorded in Canada](#). There have been more than 5,500 reported fires that have burned more than 13.4 million hectares. The latter figure represents six-fold the average seen in the last decade of wildfire seasons of 2.2 million hectares burned. The fight to contain the fires has cost the lives of [at least four firefighters](#) as Canada has enlisted help from the [United States, Mexico and overseas](#) to stop the spread of flames.

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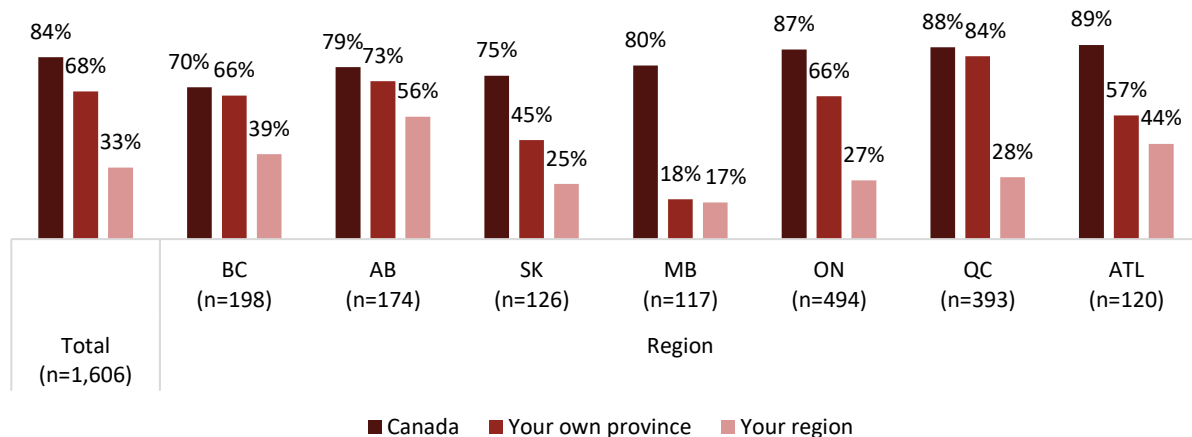
**Canadians endure a “terrible” year of fires**

The severity and frequency of the fires have not gone unnoticed by most Canadians. More than four-in-five (84%) say this wildfire season has been worse than average, including half (51%) who say this has been a “terrible” year for wildfire activity.

Regionally, those in Quebec are the most likely to say it has been a bad year for wildfires in their province. Quebec has had [the most area burned](#) so far this fire season.

More than two-in-five (44%) in Atlantic Canada say regionally they’ve had a worse-than-average year for fires. The Barrington Lake Fire in May and June was [the worst in Nova Scotia’s recorded history](#). The fires came as [a surprise](#) to some in Atlantic Canada, given the typically wet and mild weather in the region. However, [atypical dry conditions](#) perhaps led to the size and speed of the Barrington Lake Fire’s spread.

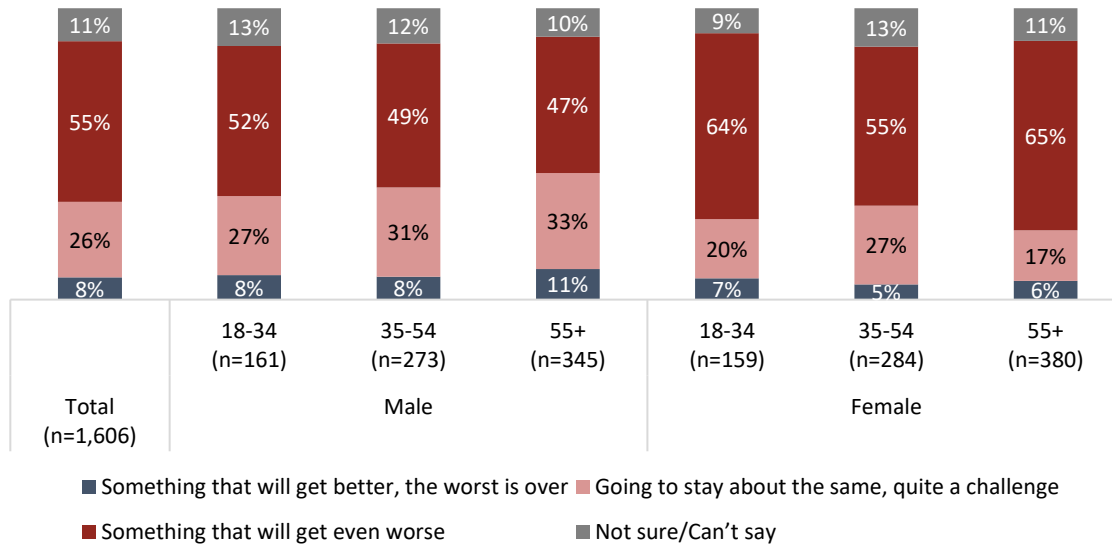
**How would you describe wildfires this summer for each of the following?  
(Percentage who say worse than average/terrible shown)**



**More than half feel fires will worsen in coming decades, few see hope for improvement**

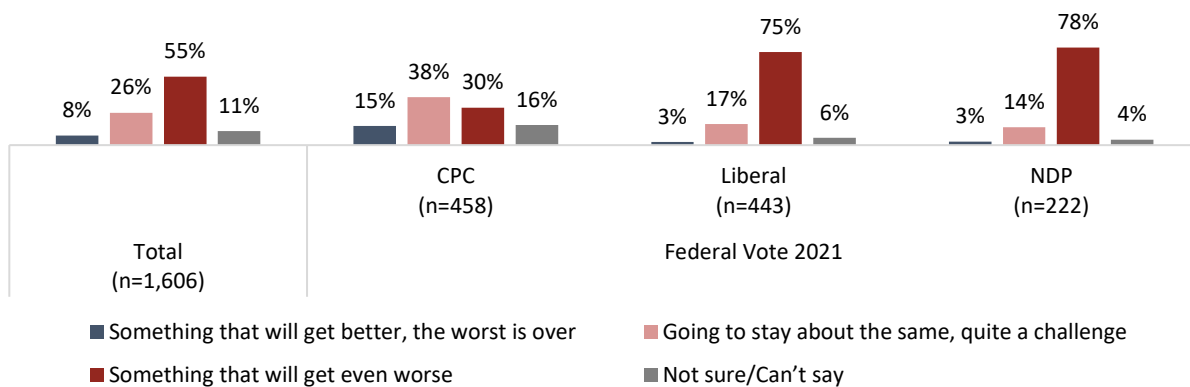
As Canadians watch a record amount of the country burn, there is little optimism there will be better summers for wildfires in the future. A majority (55%) believe wildfires will continue to worsen. One-quarter (26%) expect future fire seasons to present a challenge, but no more than they already are. Few (8%) expect improvement:

**Thinking again about the number of wildfires in Canada and their impact, over the next 10 to 20 years would you say this is:**



Perspectives over what the future holds are not uniform. For past Liberal or New Democrat voters, three-quarters anticipate worse summers to come. For past CPC voters, fewer than half as many say this, but a majority still say the situation will persist (38%) or worsen (30%):

**Thinking again about the number of wildfires in Canada and their impact, over the next 10 to 20 years would you say this is:**



**Most say climate change human caused, responsible for intensifying fire season**

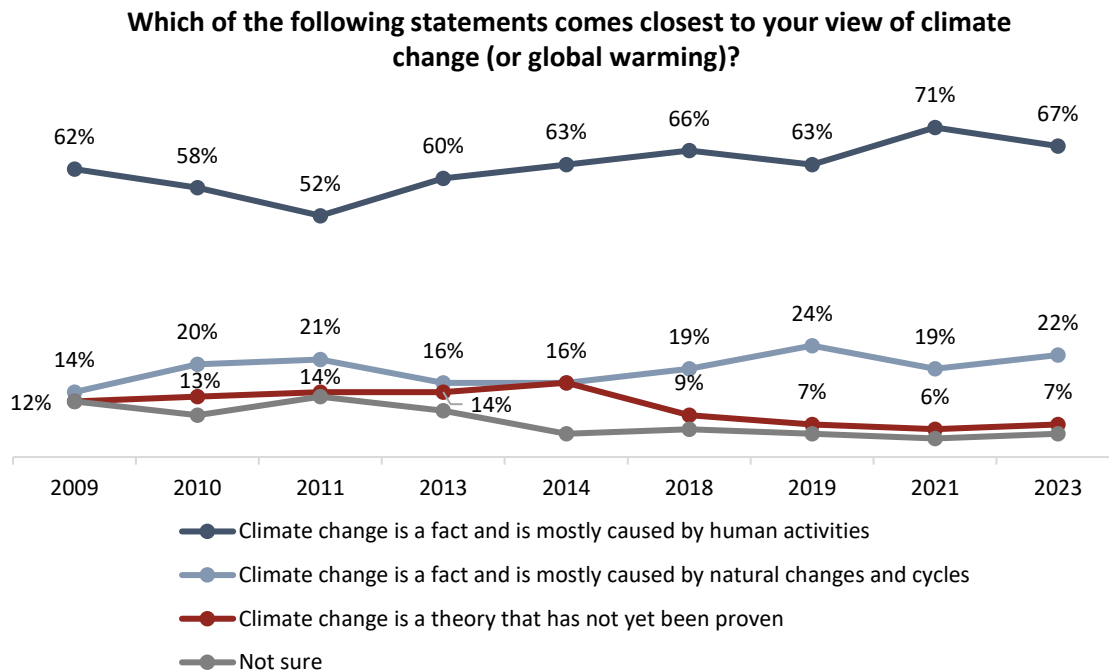
Canadian's pessimism aligns with the expectations of climate scientists, who believe wildfires will continue to worsen as the climate becomes hotter and drier in many areas around the world.

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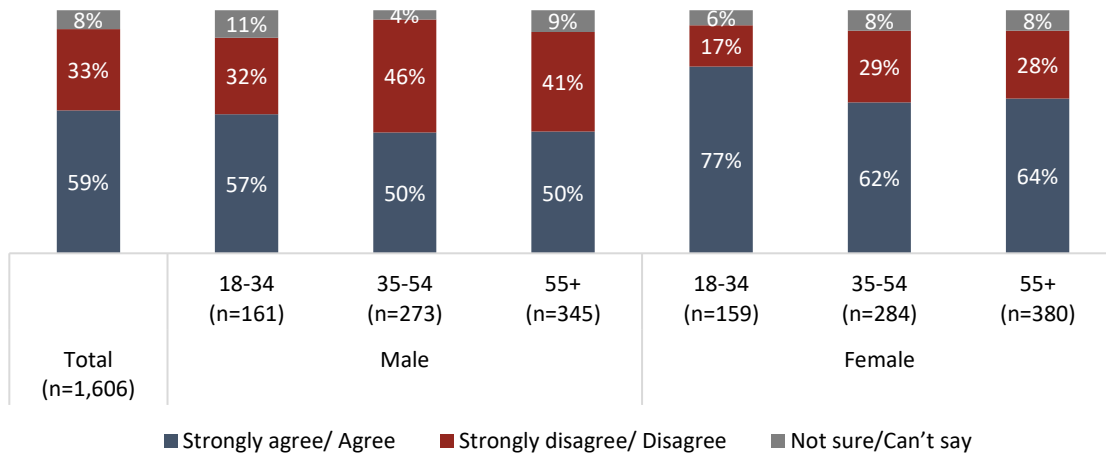
Among Canadians, two-thirds (67%) believe climate change is a fact and it is caused by human activities. One-in-five (22%) agree climate change is happening, but quibble with the cause, instead believing it is caused by natural cycles. Seven per cent disagree that climate change is a fact at all and instead call it a theory.

The latter group has halved in the past decade. Meanwhile, the percentage of Canadians who describe it as human-caused has declined from a high of seven-in-ten (71%) seen in 2021:



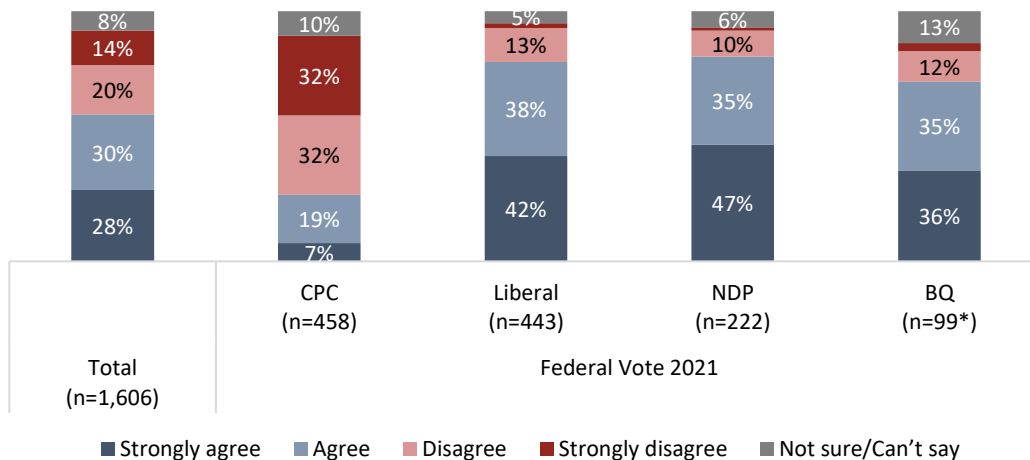
Canadians are less convinced this destructive fire season is directly linked to climate change despite the widespread belief that the climate is changing. Still, most (59%) say this record wildfire season is directly linked to the changing climate. One-third (33%) disagree, including more than two-in-five men over the age of 34. Women are much more likely to say there is a direct link between climate change and this record wildfire season in Canada:

Agree vs. disagree -  
"These wildfires are directly linked to climate change"



Among past voters of the country's four largest political parties, only those who voted Conservative in 2021 disagree that there is a direct link between this spate of wildfires and climate change at a majority level. Otherwise, at least seven-in-10 past Liberal (80%), NDP (82%) and Bloc Québécois voters (71%) say climate change has had a direct influence on wildfires this year:

Agree vs. disagree -  
"These wildfires are directly linked to climate change"



\*Smaller sample size, interpret with caution

**Three-in-five say action needed now, one-in-10 say it's already too late**

The summer has perhaps brought a renewed focus on the climate emergency for Canadians. As the fires burn, and smoke spreads, Canadians also have been dealing with record heat in some areas of the country.

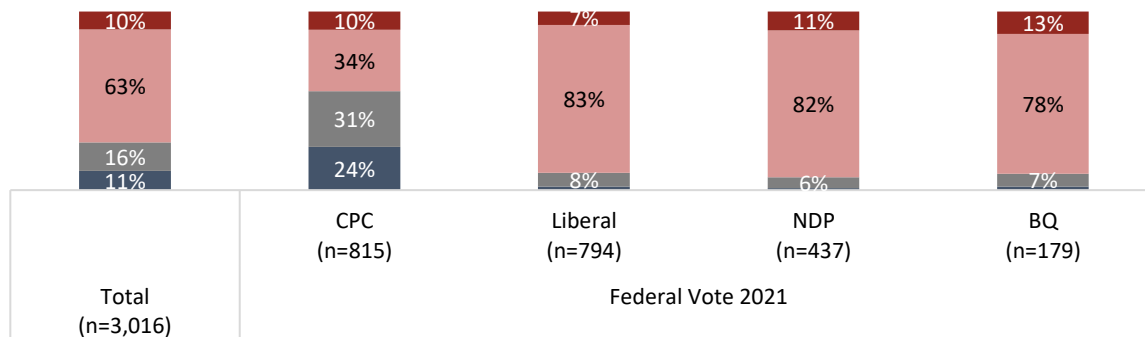
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Overall, three-in-five (61%) describe climate change as a “crisis” that needs an immediate response. One-in-10 (10%) have given up hope that humans will turn things around. On the other side of the spectrum, one-in-six (16%) see the changing climate as a problem, but one that doesn’t need to be immediately addressed. A further one-in-nine (11%) don’t believe anything needs to be done.

Past CPC voters are much more likely to be in the latter group (24%) than other political supporters. In fact, those who voted Conservative in 2021 are the only group of party supporters who don’t describe climate change as a “crisis” at majority levels. Nearly all past Liberal, NDP and BQ voters believe quick action on climate change is needed:

**How do you feel about the current state of the climate change and how society should respond? Would you say:**



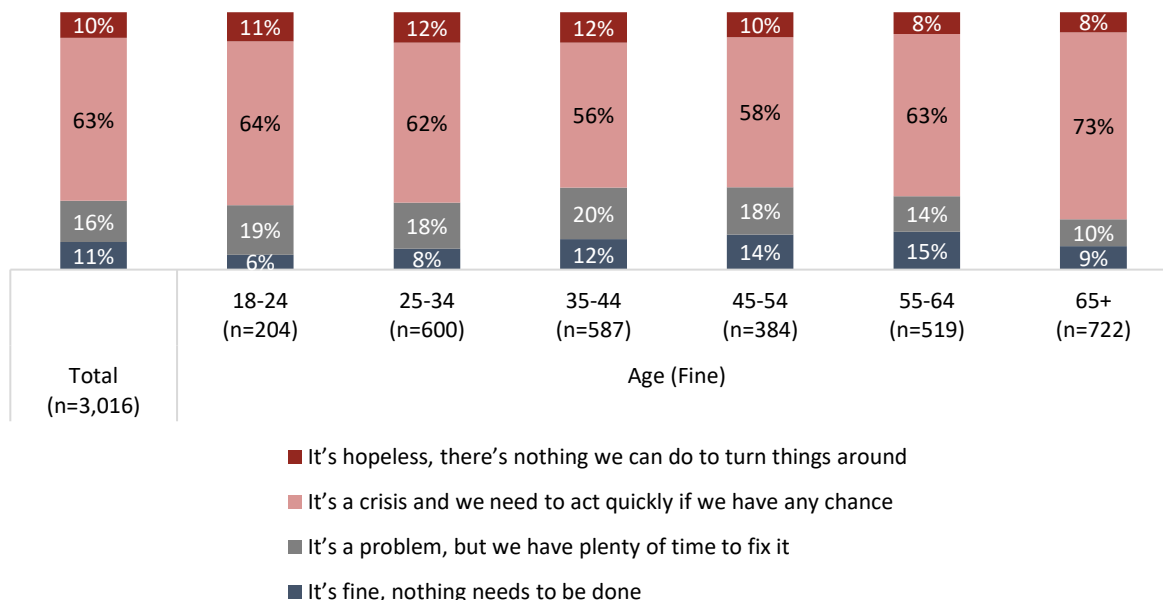
- It's hopeless, there's nothing we can do to turn things around
- It's a crisis and we need to act quickly if we have any chance
- It's a problem, but we have plenty of time to fix it
- It's fine, nothing needs to be done

Age appears to be a factor in how Canadians view the issue of climate change. Canadians aged 35 to 64 are more likely than others to believe nothing needs to be done. However, a majority of all age groups believe climate change to be a crisis which needs immediate action:

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**How do you feel about the current state of the climate change and how society should respond? Would you say:**



**Part Two: How fires have affected Canadians this summer**

Wildfires have affected wide swaths of the country, including areas such as Nova Scotia that typically go unscathed, as noted above. When this data was taken, four-in-five (83%) say smoke had impacted their summer, more than two-in-five (44%) who described it as bad or hugely disruptive ([see detailed tables](#)).

However, many more have been affected by fire and smoke in recent days, with fires threatening the cities of [Kelowna](#) and [Yellowknife](#). (Note, the small populations of the territories preclude drawing discrete samples over multiple waves. Data from the territories is not released.)

**Smoke keeping many inside, worsening health problems for one-in-five impacted**

The fire and smoke of this record wildfire season have had wide-reaching impacts. Half (53%) of those affected by either the smoke or wildfire say poor air quality is keeping them inside more than they would like to be during the warmer weather. Others in the path of the flames and fumes say they are experiencing direct health effects (20%), while others report more indirect ones – not exercising as much as they would like (25%). At the time of this survey, one-in-eight (13%) affected by this wildfire season say they've felt the stress of worrying about potential property damage to their own or friends' and family's homes:

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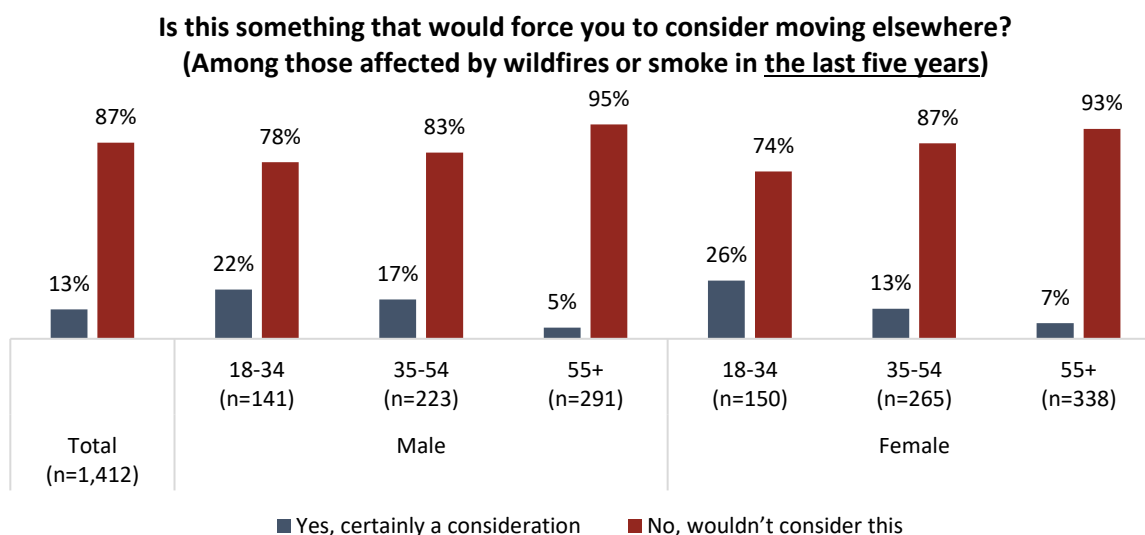
Please tell us the ways, if any, that the wildfires have specifically affected you:  
(Among those who have been impacted by wildfires or smoke this year)

	Total (n=1,330)	Region						
		BC (n=138)	AB (n=160)	SK (n=118)	MB (n=101)	ON (n=448)	QC (n=316)	ATL (n=69*)
Staying inside more than you would like	53%	42%	65%	60%	52%	59%	46%	25%
Irritation of eyes due to smoke	43%	41%	58%	49%	44%	50%	24%	29%
Not exercising as much	25%	23%	32%	22%	11%	27%	24%	10%
Health problems have worsened due to smoke	20%	18%	34%	20%	18%	23%	12%	7%
Worried about damage to your home or the home of a close friend/ family member	13%	20%	20%	4%	7%	10%	10%	40%
Cancelled/ changed travel plans	13%	24%	24%	11%	4%	9%	8%	17%
None of these	21%	19%	11%	17%	27%	18%	30%	32%

\*Smaller sample size, interpret with caution

### One-in-eight affected by recent wildfires consider moving

The severity of this wildfire season has some considering how they can avoid the effects of smoke and fire in the future. One-in-eight (13%) say they would consider moving somewhere else after being affected by wildfire or smoke in the past five years. Canadians under 35 – and especially women – are the most likely to consider relocating:

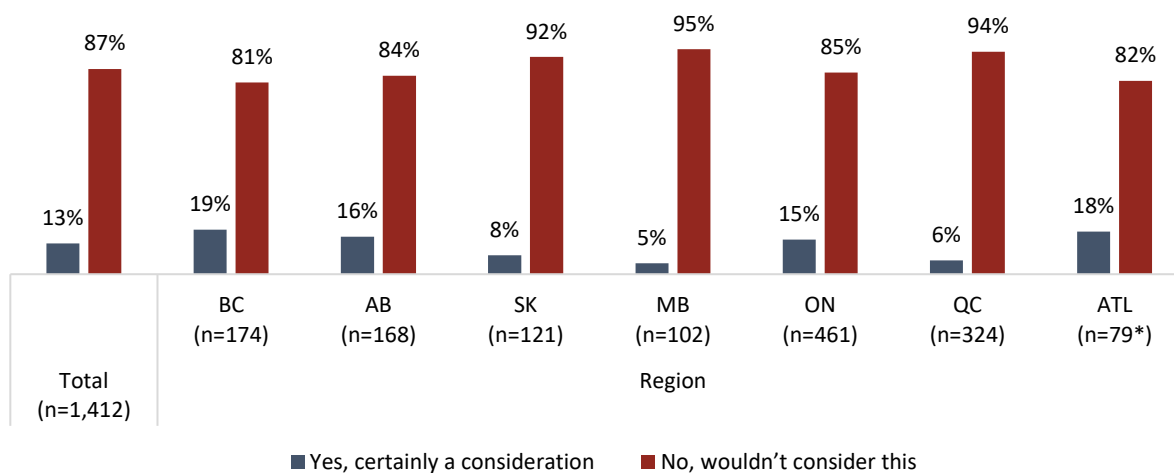


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One-in-five in B.C. (19%) and one-six in Alberta (16%) affected by recent wildfires and smoke say moving to avoid future wildfire seasons is something on their mind. Those two provinces are home to some of the worst fires of [previous years](#) when it comes to damage to towns and cities. The 2016 Fort McMurray wildfire was [the costliest disaster in Canadian history](#), while wildfires in 2017 in B.C. destroyed [more than 300 buildings](#). In 2021, a [wildfire destroyed most of the village](#) of Lytton, B.C., killing two people.

**Is this something that would force you to consider moving elsewhere?  
(Among those affected by wildfires or smoke in the last five years)**



*\*Smaller sample size, interpret with caution*

**For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics for the Aug. 8-11 study, [click here](#).**

**For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics for the July 26-31 study, [click here](#).**

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