



August 9, 2017

Dear MS Bike participant (Cowichan Valley Experience and West Kootenay Challenge),

As MS Bike weekend draws near, it is important to share information with all participants about safety protocols in light of the BC forest fires. Our thoughts are with all British Columbians who have been affected by the devastation of the fires this summer, and we join many in wishing for a swift end to the province-wide state of emergency. While we remain optimistic that conditions will improve, we are monitoring the situation very closely as it pertains to our upcoming MS Bike events. It is imperative that we have plans in place to address issues related to air quality and its possible impacts on participants of our events.

The health and safety of our participants, volunteers, and staff are of utmost concern and our highest priority. Please be advised that in the days immediately prior to the event, if the Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) is deemed to be “high risk” (a rating of 7 or higher according to Environment Canada) for the region where your Bike tour is taking place, we will unfortunately be unable to proceed with the tour.

We recognize that for many, there have been significant efforts made to participate in an MS Bike Tour – in training, travel arrangements, fundraising efforts and team recruitment. On behalf of the 12,000 British Columbians affected by MS, we are incredibly grateful for your efforts in the fight to end MS and we are eager to see the tours move forward as planned. Initiatives such as MS Bike provide gifts of hope and support to so many individuals affected by MS – advancements in research and the provision of vital programs and services are made possible only through the fundraising efforts of participants like you. Any decision to cancel an event will not be taken lightly, but our responsibility to all of you is also one that we take very seriously and we will not put your health at risk. We will review the situation on **Wednesday, August 16** and will make a decision regarding the status of each event based on Environment Canada AQHI information available at that time. If the decision on August 16 is to proceed and conditions worsen in the days after, we will reverse that decision and cancel the event. We will provide an update to all participants on that date regarding the decision, the tour status of each MS Bike Tour will be circulated via email to all participants, on social media and will be posted on our website at <https://mssociety.ca/division/bc-and-yukon-division>

The following directions will apply:

**AQHI of 1-3 - Low Risk:** MS Bike Tour to proceed as planned, no precautions necessary

**AQHI of 4-6 - Moderate Risk:** MS Bike Tour to proceed with caution

- *At-risk populations (determined by Environment Canada as people with a history of heart or lung conditions, older adults, young children and those who are generally active outdoors) are asked to self-assess their participation and reduce or eliminate strenuous activity; general population asked to modify their activity if symptoms evident (coughing, irritated throat)*
- *We will continue to monitor the conditions - if conditions worsen and reach the point of high risk at any time prior to or during the tour, the tour will be cancelled immediately.*

**AQHI of 7 or higher – High Risk:** MS Bike Tour to be cancelled

Please be assured that the MS Society team remains committed to producing a high-quality bike tour for your enjoyment – our supporters and partners at our points of interest and venues are all looking forward to welcoming you and acknowledging your efforts. Even if faced with the disappointing situation of a cancelled tour, the organizing committees are creatively working to develop alternate options – and for both tours scheduled for the August 19-20 weekend, the Saturday evening dinner will proceed as planned, even if the tour is cancelled, so that we can move forward in the spirit of the event and celebrate your achievements and dedication to our mission. We are committed to working with each of you to address all of your concerns. Please see the attached FAQ for additional information, and do not hesitate to reach out to your MS Bike Coordinator if you have further questions or concerns about your participation in light of the potential air quality issues (Cowichan Valley Experience – [Sheron.chrysler@mssociety.ca](mailto:Sheron.chrysler@mssociety.ca) ; West Kootenay Challenge – [jillian.earl@mssociety.ca](mailto:jillian.earl@mssociety.ca))

We thank you for your continued support and look forward to providing you with an update on August 16.

Sincerely,



Tania Vrionis, President  
MS Society of Canada, BC & Yukon Division

## FAQ – BC Forest Fires and MS Bike Tour Events

**1. Where can I find information about the Air Quality Health Index (AQHI)?**

- Air Quality Health Index ratings and predicted maximums can be found at: [https://weather.gc.ca/airquality/pages/provincial\\_summary/bc\\_e.html](https://weather.gc.ca/airquality/pages/provincial_summary/bc_e.html)

**2. When/how will I be notified if my MS Bike Tour will be cancelled?**

- An initial decision will be made regarding the status of the August 19-20 MS Bike Tours on the morning of Wednesday, August 16, based on the AQHI index. An event will be cancelled at that time if the AQHI is rated at or is predicted to reach 7 or higher in the geographic area of the MS Bike Tour. If the index is rated at moderate risk (between 4-6), the event will proceed with caution and may be cancelled immediately if the AQHI worsens and reaches high risk status prior to, or during the event. We encourage all participants to conduct a self-assessment of their personal risk situation prior to participating in a tour if a moderate air quality risk rating is evident.

**3. If the decision is made on August 16 to cancel my tour and the AQHI improves by August 19, can the tour proceed?**

- If, on August 16, the decision to cancel an event is announced, the decision will not be reversed as the municipalities, points of interest vendors and volunteers will be immediately notified that we are unable to proceed as planned due to poor air quality. As you can imagine, each bike tour requires significant support from volunteers as well as our points of interest (many who invest in additional staffing resources to support the event), and we can not proceed with an event without those critical resources. The August 16 date has been selected in order to respectfully provide appropriate notice to all participants, partners and volunteers.

**4. If the decision is made on August 16 to proceed with my tour and the AQHI deteriorates, will the tour proceed?**

- If at any point the AQHI hits 7 or more in the time between Aug. 16 and the day of the event, the event will be cancelled.

**5. Can I switch to another MS Bike event in BC or can I shift my registration to 2018?**

- Participants are welcome to consider alternate BC events. While both the Cowichan Valley Experience and the West Kootenay Challenge take place on the same weekend, it is anticipated that there may be very different weather/air quality conditions in each area of the province. We are committed to working with you to accommodate any requested changes. We would also be happy to welcome any riders to the MS Bike Okanagan Experience in the beautiful Kelowna area on September 9-10 (conditions permitting). Please contact your MS Bike Coordinator if you wish to explore these options. In the unfortunate situation of a bike tour cancellation, cyclists will be provided with complimentary registration for a 2018 event of their choice.

**6. Even if my event is cancelled, can I make the decision on my own to do the ride anyway?**

- We do not encourage or endorse riding in conditions that are deemed to be high-risk. Any cyclist that chooses to ride the course after a cancellation has been announced will be prohibited from wearing a MS Bike bib and is considered to be riding independently.

**7. Will I incur cancellation costs for travel?**

- The MS Society can not assume individual cancellation costs – please contact your travel partners directly for cancellation policies.

**8. With the potential for cancellation of the event, should I continue with my fundraising efforts?**

- We hope that all participants will actively continue their fundraising efforts. Each year, fundraising efforts allow us to provide much needed services and support to more than 12,000 British Columbians affected by MS, and to make significant investments in research that are bringing us closer to a cure.

**9. If an event is cancelled, will any components of the event still continue?**

- The organizing committees of both tours are prepared to move forward with the Saturday evening dinner and festivities, even in the event of a tour cancellation. Specific details about each event will be shared at the time of cancellation. We plan to continue to recognize and honour our top team and fundraisers and to celebrate our collective efforts. Of course, fundraising incentives will be awarded to all qualifying participants.