

Southern Ontario Smoke: Past, Present

<https://gemini.google.com/app/394a7fb04ba0726a>

User prompt: Please sketch out a chart or table showing what you made of the wildfire smoke in southern Ontario, Canada for the last three years say. Is it far to say that 2024 was when it started getting bad, and then there was last year's nightmarish scenes in... what month was it, again? So I am tending to focus on June-July-August, if that is a good sampling. Also Toronto has been a bit clearer for... several days, even as there seemed to be reports of... emergency evacuations stretching down much closer to Thunder Bay than previously? So where is the smoke blowing then??? If it is easier to just provide LINKS to this information that is okay too. I am not going anywhere with it... I just want to pigeon-hole it in my mind's eye so to speak.

Response: That timeline trips a lot of people up because the smoky summers have started blurring together! The "nightmarish" scenes you're remembering—where the sky turned an apocalyptic orange and Toronto had the worst air quality in the world—actually happened in **June 2023**.

That was Canada's record-shattering, historic fire season. Focusing on the **June–August** window is the exact right timeframe, as that's when heatwaves and jet stream patterns pull northern smoke down into the Golden Horseshoe.

Here is a breakdown of how the last four summer seasons compare for Southern Ontario:

Southern Ontario Wildfire Smoke Summary (2023–2026)

Year	Peak Months	Smoke Severity in Southern Ontario	What Was Happening
2023	June (with waves in July/Aug)	Extreme / Unprecedented	Massive fires in Quebec and Northern Ontario sent dense plumes directly south. Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) hit 10+ (hazardous) in Toronto.
2024	July–August	Low to Moderate	Western Canada (Alberta/Jasper & BC) suffered heavily, but weather patterns largely spared Southern Ontario from prolonged thick haze.
2025	June & August	Moderate to High	Canada's second-worst fire season on record. Recurring smoke corridors brought multiple hazardous air warnings back to the GTA.
2026 (Current)	July	Variable / Short Spikes	Severe fires broke out in Northwestern Ontario. Toronto had a brief heavy smoke spike in mid-July, but winds have since shifted.

Where is the smoke blowing right now?

The reason Toronto has enjoyed clearer skies over the past few days—even while emergency evacuations were declared across Northwestern Ontario (in communities like Whitesand First Nation, Armstrong, and areas surrounding Thunder Bay)—comes down to **prevailing wind directions and jet stream troughs**.

1. **The Fire Zone:** The active, out-of-control fires are clustered in Northwestern Ontario around districts like Nipigon, Red Lake, and Sioux Lookout.
 2. **The Wind Trajectory:** A low-pressure weather system and upper-level winds have been pushing those massive smoke plumes **east/northeast across Northern Quebec** and **south into the US Upper Midwest and Northeast** (Minnesota, Michigan, and down toward New York/Boston).
 3. **The Toronto Pocket:** Southern Ontario happens to sit in a temporary clear slot between fronts. Because smoke travels in long, narrow corridors thousands of kilometers long, a city can sit right under clear air even if a fire 1,000 km away is blowing smoke to the south or north of it.
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