

Reduce Exposure to Ash When Returning Home After a Fire



If you live near homes that burned, you should be aware of possible hazards to your health, even if your home was not damaged by the fire.

Ash and debris from burnt structures may be blown indoors and into areas not affected by the fires.

Ash contains toxic substances and may be irritating to the skin, eyes, nose and throat. Ash is unhealthy to breathe and may trigger asthmatic attacks.

Following these simple tips will reduce your exposure to ash and protect your health:



Keep Ash Away

- Do not allow children to play in the ash and wash off children's toys before children play with them.
- Immediately wash any part of your body that touches ash to avoid irritation. The best protection for children is to keep them indoors to reduce their exposure until ash has been removed.
- Wash fruits and vegetables from your garden thoroughly before eating them.
- Remove shoes before entering your home or use "sticky mats" in entryways and doors to remove dust and ash from your shoes. Sticky mats are sold in hardware stores.
- Keep pets out of ash areas and wash pets when they have been exposed to ash.



Keep Your Indoor Environment Clean

- Frequently clean indoor surfaces and follow by wet mopping to reduce exposure to ash indoors.
- Use only high efficiency particulate air (HEPA-filter) vacuum cleaners. Shop vacuums and other common vacuum cleaners do not filter out small particles, but instead can put particles back into the air where they can be inhaled.



Wear Protective Clothing and a Respirator When Working Outside

- Do not use leaf blowers or do any activities that will put ash into the air.
- Wear gloves, long sleeved shirts, long pants, socks, and shoes to avoid skin contact with ash and other debris.
- Double bag debris and ash in plastic bags or other containers. Be sure to seal all bags or containers to prevent ash from being redistributed in the environment by wind or rain.
- Wear a close fitting respirator mask that is rated N-95 or P-100 to block particles from ash or smoke from being inhaled. N-95 respirators are well-fitted when they do not come into contact with facial hair; strap tension is adequate, not overly tightened; and masks fit across the nose bridge. A tight seal would not be possible for most children, even with a small adult-size model. People with heart or lung disease should consult their physician before using a respirator during post-fire cleanup.
- The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) is the only agency that certifies respirators to determine that they adequately protect people. Look for NIOSH approval on the package or label.

