

Safe Clean-Up and Work Practices During and After Wildfires

The risk to your health from unhealthy air quality is based on fine particles that are not visible. Decisions about when to clean should be based on the level of fine particles and the air. Local air quality information is available at www.ourair.org/todays-air-quality/

To clean ash, remember the three C's: Control, Contain and Capture

Control: Try to control the amount of ash particles that get re-suspended into the air. Avoid using any equipment that blows ash into the air such as standard shop vacuums or leaf blowers. Instead, use household vacuums or shop vacuums with HEPA filters.

Contain: Contain ash by gently sweeping indoor and outdoor hard surfaces followed by wet mopping with a damp cloth. Ash may be disposed of in plastic bags in regular trash receptacles. You may also allow water from cleaning to drain into landscaping, as ash will not hurt plants or grass.

Capture: Protect storm drains from ash and any cleaning chemicals used while cleaning by diverting away from storm drains or recapturing. Ash is highly acidic, which in large amounts can be harmful for people, the environment, and aquatic life.



We do not advise ash clean-up while ash is still falling and the situation is unpredictable. Wait until conditions improve.

The following is recommended for safe clean-up:

- Avoid skin contact with ash. Although ash from organic materials like trees and brush is not harmful to the skin, ash from burned homes and other items will likely contain metals, chemicals, and potentially asbestos, items that may be considered toxic if breathed in or touched with wet skin. If you are cleaning ash from a burned home or car, take special care to protect your health. If you do get the ash on your skin, wash it off immediately. Some wet ash from burned homes or cars can cause chemical burns.
- Inhaled ash may be irritating to the nose, throat and lungs. Use protective wear. Wear a tight fitting N95 respirator mask or P-100 mask, gloves, long-sleeved shirts, and long pants when cleaning up ash. No one with heart or lung conditions should handle ash clean-up.
- Avoid getting ash into the air as much as possible. If sweeping up ash, sweep gently. Use water and a wet cloth or mop to clean items and surfaces.
- Avoid doing activities that stir up ash. Do not allow children to play in ash or be in an area where ash-covered materials are being disturbed. Wash ash off toys before children play with them.
- Clean ash off pets.
- Do not consume any food, beverages or medications that have been exposed to smoke, ash, heat, pressure, or chemicals.
- Commercial cleaning may be needed for carpet, upholstery, and window treatments. Clean and sanitize utensils, glasses, dishware and food contact areas, such as countertops and cupboards. To decontaminate these items:
 1. Wash them in a strong detergent solution.
 2. Soak in a bleach solution of one teaspoon of bleach per quart of water. Soak for 15 minutes.
 3. Wash, rinse, and air dry.

DO NOT USE LEAF BLOWERS under any circumstances as they blow the fine particles around and create more health concerns. Alternatives to leaf blowers include:

- Sweep gently with a push broom and then hose lightly with water. Take care to conserve water. Ash can be put in plastic bags and then placed into trash receptacles.
- Using a shop vacuum equipped with a high-efficiency particulate filter (HEPA) and a disposable filter bag.

If you have symptoms that may be related to exposure to smoke or soot, consult your doctor. Symptoms include repeated coughing, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing, wheezing, chest tightness or pain, palpitations, headaches and nausea or unusual fatigue or lightheadedness.