

# Returning Home After a Fire

## Take Precautions. Be Safe. Protect Your Health.



### Ash Clean-up in Areas Without Fire Damage

- Ash, soot, dust, and other airborne particles may have been deposited **inside** and **outside** of homes and businesses.
- Ash from wildfires is relatively non-toxic but can irritate, skin, eyes, nose, and throat.
- Ash in air may trigger asthmatic attacks in people who already have asthma.
- Ash, dust and debris (**particularly from burned buildings**) may contain toxic and cancer-causing chemicals, including asbestos, arsenic, and lead.



- **Do not let children play in or with items covered by the ash.**
- To avoid skin contact, **wear household dishwashing gloves, long-sleeved shirt and long pants** during clean up. If ash does get on your skin, wash off with warm water and soap as soon as possible.



- If handling broken material (i.e., glass, metals, wood, etc.) wear gloves that protect against cuts, abrasions and punctures (i.e., leather or Kevlar gloves).
- A disposable N-95 mask or better can be worn during clean-up to avoid breathing in ash and other airborne particles. However, they do not protect from gases. They can be purchased from a home/hardware store. **N-95 masks must be properly fitted**, with no gaps around the edges. An improperly fitted mask is the same as wearing no mask at all.



#### IMPORTANT REMINDERS:

- Follow label instructions on package for proper use
- People who must be outside for extended periods of time in an ash-covered area may benefit from using a tight-fitting N95 respirator or greater to reduce their exposure
- N-95 masks may make it harder to breath, especially for those with lung or heart disease



- Try not to get ash into the air. **Do not use leaf blowers** or other actions that will put ash into the air. **Gentle sweeping** of indoor and outdoor surfaces, **followed by wet mopping**, is the best way to clean an area with ash. A solution of bleach and water may be used to disinfect an area, if desired. Read label on container for proper use.
- Wear **safety goggles** (not safety glasses) if clean-up may cause ash in the air **and** if using chemical cleaning solutions, to prevent splashing into the eyes.
- Wear safety shoes or sturdy close-toed, high-ankle leather shoes if burn debris (i.e., broken glass, metal, wood, etc.) is in the area that is being cleaned.



- **Shop vacuums and regular household vacuum cleaners are not recommended** to clean up ash. These vacuums do not filter out small particles, but blow particles into the air where they can be breathed in. **HEPA-filter vacuums** can filter out small particles and can be used.
- Ash may be thrown away in the regular trash by **placing it in a plastic trash bag first**; this will prevent the ash from becoming airborne and blowing away as the trash can is emptied.
- Shower regularly throughout the day when cleaning in and out of areas with ash.



# Water Safety After a Fire

If you are impacted by a fire, check with your local water district. Boil water notices may be in place due to fire response efforts.

Customers in the affected areas are advised to use **bottled water** or **boil tap water for one minute** prior to its use for drinking, brushing teeth, cooking and cleaning indoor surfaces, such as countertops, stove tops, tables and sinks. Boiling the water kills bacteria and other organisms that may have been introduced to the system. If power (gas or electric) is unavailable, residents should use bottled water, **or** eight drops of household bleach to one gallon of tap water and let it sit for 30 minutes. If your water looks cloudy or dirty, do not drink it. When normal water service returns, flush the hot and cold-water lines until the water appears clear and the water quality returns to normal.



# Wildlife After a Fire

Wildlife displaced by wildfire activity may enter your property or home. Places where there is an accumulation of trash or debris can attract wild animals.

- **Keep garbage in rodent-proof containers that are tightly covered to avoid attracting animals.**
- **Do not leave pet food outdoors.**
- Check for areas where rats and wild animals can sleep, hide, or find food. If possible, seal these areas.
- Protect yourself by wearing gloves and a mask when cleaning these areas. Wash your hands when you're finished.



# Food Safety After a Power Outage



The safety of food may be a problem if the power outage lasted for a long period of time. If you experience a power outage or find that your kitchen has ash, soot, dust, and other airborne particles, **avoid foodborne illness by following these recommendations:**

- Any food or drink products with an off odor or signs of spoilage should be thrown away. Best practice is: **“When in doubt, throw it out.”**
- Generally, food in the refrigerator is safe if the power was out for no more than **4 hours and** the refrigerator and freezer doors were kept close. Keeping the doors to the refrigerator and freezer closed helps maintain the coldest temperatures.
- If a power outage lasts more than four hours or the refrigerator door was not kept shut, it is best to **throw away perishable food** items such as meat, dairy products and eggs.
- Items that have thawed in the freezer should be thrown away. **Do not re-freeze thawed food.** All other food items should be inspected to ensure safety.
- Plastic bottles with liquid (ex: water), that has been covered in ash should be thrown away. It is **not enough** to rinse off the bottle as these particles contaminate the caps, making them very difficult to decontaminate.
- Food that has not been stored in waterproof or airtight containers and has been covered with ash should be thrown away. This includes products that have been stored in cardboard or other soft packaging.
- Food stored in sealed, previously unopened glass or metal cans or jars, such as baby food, should be safe for use. Clean before opening and transfer the contents to another container before eating.
- **Throw food away in trash bags** and seal tightly before placing in the trash can. Double bagging is recommended to prevent fly breeding.