



**NORTHERN
SONOMA COUNTY**
AIR POLLUTION CONTROL DISTRICT

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AIR DISTRICT ADVISORY: Fire Ash Safety and Asbestos Notification Requirements

October 18, 2017

PLEASE USE EXTRA CAUTION WHEN HANDLING OR DISTURBING FIRE ASH. All persons accessing burned structures should be aware of the hazards associated with those sites. Cleanup efforts may expose you to ash, soot, and fire decomposition products that may cause irritation and other health effects. **Ash from burned structures is generally more hazardous than forest ash.** Fire ash in the air contains tiny particles (dust, dirt, soot) that can be deposited on indoor and outdoor surfaces and may contain hazardous chemicals such as metals like lead, cadmium, arsenic and mercury; asbestos from older homes or other buildings; perfluorochemicals (such as Teflon), flame retardants, and caustic alkali materials (such as lye and oven cleaner).

Health Effects of Ash: Fire ash may be irritating to the skin, nose, throat, and may cause coughing. Fine particles can be inhaled deeply into lungs and can aggravate asthma, cause heart attacks, or make it difficult to breathe. Products of fire and ash are known to contain irritants that can aggravate lung disease and asthma, and cancer-causing chemicals.

Sensitive People: Health effects differ amongst different groups of people. Those individuals with asthma, pregnant women, the elderly, and those with pre-existing medical conditions (especially heart and lung conditions such as COPD or emphysema) should exercise caution when retrieving belongings or walking through an ash contaminated site.

Children: Do not allow children to play in ash. Wash and clean all children's toys before using. Children should not be in the vicinity while cleanup is in progress. Even if you are careful it is easy to stir up ash that may contain hazardous substances. In addition, the exploratory behavior of children may result in direct contact with contaminated materials.

Pets: Clean ash off house pets and other domesticated animals. Do not allow pets on contaminated sites. **AVOID** direct contact with ash. If you get ash on your skin, in your eyes, or in your mouth, wash off immediately.

Clothing: Wear gloves, long sleeved shirts, and long pants to avoid skin contact. Goggles are also recommended. Contact with wet ash may cause chemical burns on skin. If you do get ash on your skin, wash it off as soon as possible. Remove shoes and clothing prior to leaving the site to avoid tracking ash offsite, into your car, or other places.

Masks: When exposure to dust or ash cannot be avoided, use a well-fitted NIOSH-certified air-purifying respirator (N-95 or more protective). A mask rated N-95 will be more effective than simpler dust or surgical

masks in blocking particles from ash. Although smaller sized masks may appear to fit a child's face, none of the manufacturers recommend their use in children. If your child is in an area that warrants wearing a mask, you should remove them to an environment with cleaner air. Persons with heart or lung disease should consult their physician before using a mask during post-fire cleanup.

Cleanup: Avoid spreading ash into the air as much as possible. Minimize sifting. Do not walk heavily, move objects, or demolish materials which will kick up ash particles and associated chemicals into the air. Gently sweep indoor and outdoor hard surfaces followed by wet mopping. A damp cloth or wet mop may be used on lightly dusted areas. When wetting down ash, use as little water as possible.

Vacuum: Use a high efficiency particulate air (HEPA)-type vacuum to clean dust-contaminated surfaces. Avoid using a typical household vacuum which will re-suspend the collected dust into the air. Shop vacuums and other common vacuum cleaners do not filter out small particles, but rather blow such particles out the exhaust into the air where they can be breathed. Do not use leaf blowers or shop vacuums or take other actions that will put ash into the air.

Food and Water: Wash any home-grown fruits or vegetables from trees or gardens before eating. Do not bring other food to the site or eat at the affected site. Consult with your drinking water provider to ensure it is safe to drink.

Asbestos Hazard and Notification: When houses and buildings burn, asbestos fibers can become airborne, creating a potentially hazardous situation. Many buildings constructed before 1981 have asbestos-containing materials. Buildings constructed after 1981 will have less of these materials, however, burning of even relatively smaller amounts of these materials may release asbestos fibers into the air. Asbestos is a known carcinogen and a respiratory hazard. The only way to determine if asbestos is present in a burned-out area is to have a certified asbestos consultant test the material. Handling materials that contain asbestos can be hazardous to your health. Typically cleanup of asbestos-containing materials is done by trained professionals with proper safety equipment.

Federal law requires that the renovation or demolition of structures that contain asbestos submit an advance notification to the District and that asbestos materials be handled by EPA-certified contractors. Under Northern Sonoma Air Pollution Control District (NSCAPCD) rule, family residences (1-4 family dwellings) and structures reduced completely to ash are not applicable to the District's asbestos notification rules. All other projects must submit a no-cost notification on the District's form available on its website.

Asbestos notification and applicable requirements vary depending on Air District jurisdiction. Note, there are two air districts in Sonoma County, **each with different asbestos notification and applicable requirements**. The NSCAPCD boundary covers the northern and coastal regions of Sonoma County, with the southern portion of Sonoma County is within the jurisdiction of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD). To verify your air district, please go to our web page (NoSoCoAir.net) and use the map tool. The cities/towns of Santa Rosa, Sonoma, Napa and Calistoga are in the BAAQMD. A "J" number for asbestos notification is issued only from the BAAQMD, for their jurisdiction only. Residents who reside within BAAQMD jurisdiction, please visit the [BAAQMD web site](#) for information or call the BAAQMD Public Information Office: 415-749-4900 or their Asbestos Division: 415-749-4762.

*Excerpted from CalEPA's September 2015 "[FACT SHEET: Protecting Public Health from Home and Building Fire Ash](#)"