

## State Health Officer Urges Caution During Wildfire Cleanup Efforts

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SACRAMENTO -

California Department of Public Health (CDPH) Director and State Health Officer Dr. Karen Smith today advised residents of recently burned areas to use caution in cleaning up ash from recent wildfires. The ash from trees burned in forest fires is relatively nontoxic and similar to ash that might be found in your fireplace. However, ash from burned homes and other items will likely contain metals, chemicals, and potentially asbestos, items that can be considered toxic if breathed in or touched with wet skin.

"It's good news that many of the evacuation orders have been lifted or will be lifted in the near future, but residents should be aware of potential health hazards as officials work to carefully repopulate the burned areas and the clean-up and rebuilding process begins," said Dr. Smith. "Children are especially at risk for health impacts, and traumatic events like fires can severely impact children emotionally much more than adults."

If the ash is inhaled, it can be irritating to the nose, throat and lungs and may cause coughing. Exposure to airborne ash may trigger asthmatic attacks in people who already have asthma. In order to avoid possible health problems, the following steps are recommended:

Do not allow children to play in the ash. Wash ash off toys before children play with them. Clean ash off pets.

- ⌚ Wear a mask, gloves, long sleeved shirts and long pants and avoid skin contact. Ash may be irritating to the skin, especially to those with sensitive skin.
- ⌚ If you do get ash on your skin, wash it off as soon as possible. Some wet ash can cause chemical burns.
- ⌚ If you have a vegetable garden or fruit trees, wash the fruits or vegetables before eating them.
- ⌚ Avoid getting ash into the air as much as possible. Do not use leaf blowers or take other actions that will put ash into the air.
- ⌚ Shop vacuums and other common vacuum cleaners do not filter out small particles. They blow such particles out the exhaust into the air where they can be inhaled.
- ⌚ The use of shop vacuums and other non-HEPA filter vacuums is not recommended. HEPA filter vacuums could be used, if available.

"People should seek medical care if they experience health issues such as chest pain, chest tightness or shortness of breath. It's also important to pay close attention to children and the health and emotional impacts they may be feeling," said Dr. Smith.

More information can be found on CDPH's [Be Prepared California](#) website, the [California Department of Toxic Substances Control's](#) website and the California Environmental Protection Agency's [Fire Response and Recovery](#) website.

For the latest information on the fires, visit [California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection's website](#).

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