



## PLACER COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

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### **GUIDANCE ON WATER QUALITY AND EROSION CONTROL DURING FIRE CLEANUP** **September 1, 2009**

The recent fire in Auburn has left substantial amounts of ash and debris on properties. Cleaning up after the fires is an important step in the recovery process and must be done carefully to avoid creating further impacts on public health and the environment. Additionally, due to the vegetation being eliminated by the fire, the potential for soil erosion has increased.

It is important to minimize the amount of ash, debris and soil contained in water runoff that enters our local storm water conveyance system – the gutters, culverts, and ditches-which ultimately leads to our creeks. Outdoor ash and debris clean up guidelines are as follows:

1. A damp cloth or wet mop may be all that is needed on lightly dusted areas; use as little water as possible. You may also try wetting the area and then sweeping.
2. Where wet cleaning is needed, contain wash water and debris and prevent it from entering the stormwater conveyance system. Wet clean-up methods include:
  - a. Wash ash and debris into landscaped areas wherever possible, or to fully-contained sump areas where drying can occur before removal. Dampen accumulated ash and debris and scrape it up or vacuum it up using an adequate filtering vacuum.
  - b. Clean your car by taking it to a car wash, or wash the car over a vegetated area.
  - c. For roof areas, redirect downspouts to landscaped areas or areas where runoff is prevented.
3. When wash water, ash, and debris cannot be contained on site, use as little water as possible and try to filter the wash water before it enters the stormwater conveyance system. You can filter wash water by placing gravel bags, filter fabric, or fiber rolls in front of storm drains or other discharge points in order to capture ash and debris. Scoop up captured ash and debris, double bag the debris and tie the bag, and dispose of it in the same manner as directed for larger fire-related debris.
4. If pools, spas, or fountains need to be drained for ash removal, the water should be handled in a similar manner.

One of the most damaging effects of a disaster to your land is **soil erosion**. Under normal circumstances, roots help to stabilize soil, while stems and leaves slow water down, giving it time to absorb or soak into the soil. These protective functions can be severely compromised or even eliminated by fires. In the aftermath of a fire, the potential for flooding, debris flows, and erosion is greatly increased. Fortunately there are many things you can do to protect your home or business from these damaging effects.

- Slope protection always requires the reestablishment of vegetation and may include structural measures.
- Use straw or wood chips on exposed soils.
- Use fiber rolls on long slopes to limit the length of drainage down a slope.

Call Public Works at 530-745-7567 for erosion control or water quality questions or further assistance. Information is available: <http://www.placer.ca.gov/Departments/Works/StrmWtr.aspx>

