



## Placer County Health and Human Services Department

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# What To Do After a Wildfire

Residents returning to fire damaged homes need to take many precautions. Hazardous materials as well as structural damage pose serious threats to your health and safety. It is strongly advised you take some basic safety measures when cleaning up your property.

### Returning to the Fire Zone

- **Use caution and exercise good judgment when re-entering a burned area.** Hazards may still exist, including hot spots, which can flare up without warning.
- **Avoid damaged or fallen power poles or lines, and downed wires.** **Immediately report electrical damage to authorities.** Electric wires may shock people or cause further fires. If possible, remain on the scene to warn others of the hazard until repair crews arrive.
- **Be careful around burned trees and power poles.** They may have lost stability due to fire damage.
- **Watch for ash pits and mark them for safety.** Ash pits are holes full of hot ashes, created by burned trees and stumps. Falling into ash pits or landing in them with your hands or feet can cause serious burns. Warn your family and neighbors to keep clear of these pits.
- **Visually check the stability of the trees.** Any tree that has been weakened by fire may be a hazard. Winds are normally responsible for toppling weakened trees. The wind patterns in your area may have changed as a result of the loss of adjacent tree cover.
  - **Look for burns on the tree trunk.** If the bark on the trunk has been burned off or scorched by very high temperatures completely around the circumference, the tree will not survive. Where fire has burnt deep into the trunk, the tree should be considered unstable.
  - **Look for burnt roots by probing the ground with a rod around the base of the tree and several feet away from the base.** Roots are generally six to eight inches below the surface. If the roots have been burned, you should consider this tree very unstable, and it may be toppled by wind.
  - **A scorched tree is one that has lost part or all of its leaves or needles.** Healthy deciduous trees are resilient and may produce new branches and leaves as well as sprouts at the base of the tree. Evergreen trees may survive when partially scorched. An evergreen tree that has been damaged by fire is subject to bark beetle attack. Please seek professional assistance from the forestry service concerning measures for protecting evergreens from bark beetle attack.

### Returning Your Home

- **If your home was damaged, check with your local utilities company.** Make sure gas and electricity are turned off before entering the area. PG&E Phone: (800) 743-5000
- **Use a flashlight.** Do not light matches or turn on electrical switches if you suspect electrical damage or gas leaks. Do not smoke.
- **Check for gas leaks starting at the water heater.** If you smell gas, get everyone out of the house; turn off the main gas valve, open windows and contact the utility company.
- **If there is no power, check to make sure the main breaker is on.** Fires may cause breakers to trip. If the breakers are on and power is still not present, contact the utility company.

- **Inspect the roof immediately and extinguish any sparks or embers.** Wildfires may have left burning embers that could re-ignite.
- **Recheck for smoke and sparks throughout the home, including the attic for several hours.** The winds of wildfires can blow burning embers anywhere. Keep checking your home for embers that could cause fires.
- **While sifting through debris** or when exposed to ash that is airborne, the Center for Disease Control recommends that a well-fitted, NIOSH-certified air-purifying respirator (such as an N-95 or more protective respirator) be used to reduce the potential health impacts of dust and ash. If this type of respirator cannot be obtained, then at a minimum it is recommended that a face mask, sprayed with a fine mist of water be used to reduce exposure.
- **Other hazards to be aware of:**
  - Unstable walls and roofs
  - Sharp objects such as nails, glass, metal, etc
  - Dead and injured animals
  - Snakes

### **Personal Protection**

Debris from burned buildings and homes may contain toxic substances because of the many synthetic, hazardous, and other materials present. Older buildings in particular may contain asbestos and lead. It's important to protect yourself from these materials and other fire-related dangers; for more information see the Department of Toxic Substances Control - Emergency Guidance on Wildfires.

[http://www.dtsc.ca.gov/HazardousWaste/upload/Fire\\_Emergency\\_Guidance\\_FS\\_1.pdf](http://www.dtsc.ca.gov/HazardousWaste/upload/Fire_Emergency_Guidance_FS_1.pdf)

<http://www.dtsc.ca.gov/HazardousWaste/upload/Emergency-Guidance-on-Wildfires-2.pdf>

- **Take precautions while cleaning your property. You may be exposed to potential health risks from hazardous materials.**
  - Wear protective glasses or goggles to protect your eyes.
  - Keep material/waste wet to prevent dust becoming airborne.
  - Use a well-fitted, NIOSH-certified air-purifying respirator (such as an N-95 or more protective respirator) to reduce the effects of dust and ash.
  - Wear long sleeved shirt and long pants to protect your skin.
  - Wear leather gloves to protect hands from sharp objects while removing debris.
  - Wear rubber gloves when working with plumbing fixtures, sewer piping, and chemicals.
  - Wear boots with thick (lug) soles. Avoid tennis/running shoes, whose soles can melt or be punctured.

### **Fire Debris Removal**

Ash and contaminated debris should be contained and disposed in a safe manner to minimize health hazards from breathing dust. **Ash and ash-covered materials should be wetted** to limit the potential exposure prior to and during containment and removal.

Fire debris will only be accepted at the sanitary land fill at the **Western Placer Waste Management Authority Facilities (WPWMA) see location information below. No fire debris will be accepted at the Shale Ridge Transfer Station.**

All loads must be wetted down and covered with tarps before leaving the property. Concrete loads are exempt from tarps provided the loads are wetted prior to leaving. If concrete loads generate dust then the loads must be wetted and tarped. Keep hazardous waste separate from other debris. When possible, separate recyclable materials such as scrap metal, concrete, appliances, and wood debris.

- **Fire debris should be disposed of in the sanitary landfill. There are several options for discarding the fire debris:**
  - Hire a licensed waste disposal company to haul away the debris.
  - Hire a licensed contractor to remove the debris.
  - Dispose of debris in rented dumpsters, which will be hauled to the landfill.
  - Haul your own debris to the landfill. The debris must be sprayed down with water to reduce dust, and be covered during transport. Do not wash ash and debris into the storm drains. When you arrive at the landfill, please advise the attendant that you are disposing fire debris.
  - Televisions, refrigerators and computer equipment that are not destroyed are recyclable. These items should be separated from the debris and taken to the landfill for recycling.

**Contractors:** Air monitoring will not be required per the Air Pollution Control District (APCD). Soil sampling will not be required by Environmental Health Services unless a specific site warrants the sampling.

For assistance with questions concerning dust management, contact the Placer County APCD at (530) 745-2327. Information is available on the APCD website on Fugitive Dust and Straw Blowing.

<http://www.placer.ca.gov/~media/apc/documents/Facts/fugitive%20dust%20fact%20sheet%20pdf.ashx>

<http://www.placer.ca.gov/media/apc/documents/FormsETC/StrawBlowing%20pdf.ashx>

### **Hazardous/Electronic Wastes**

**Hazardous materials such as household cleaning products, paint, batteries, gasoline, contaminated fuel and damaged fuel containers need to be properly handled to avoid risk.** During cleanup efforts, residents and workers should identify household hazardous waste (including electrical wastes) and segregate and manage them separately when feasible. Examples of household hazardous wastes include electronics, paints, automotive fluids, batteries, asbestos containing materials, mercury and compressed gas cylinders. Ensure hazardous materials are contained and do not allow any debris to enter storm drains or waterways.

- For information on how to properly dispose of household hazardous waste please call: Western Placer Waste Management Authority (916) 543-3960
- For information on how to clean up spilled hazardous materials please contact the Placer County Hazardous Materials Team at (530) 745-2300.

**Please haul all hazardous and non hazardous fire debris directly to the WPWMA facility at:**

**Western Placer Waste Management Authority (WPWMA)**  
 Entrance on 3195 Athens Avenue  
 (corner of Athens Avenue and Fiddyment Road, Roseville)  
 Monday – Friday 7:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. and weekends 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.  
 (916) 543-3960  
[www.wpwma.com](http://www.wpwma.com)

**Please notify the site attendant if you have fire debris prior to dumping the material.**

### **Propane and Heating Oil Tanks**

**If you have a propane tank system, contact a propane supplier; turn off valves on the system, and leave valves closed until the supplier inspects your system.** Tanks, brass and copper fittings and lines may have been damaged from the heat and be unsafe. If fire burned the tank, the pressure relief valve probably opened and released the contents.

**If you have a heating oil tank system, contact a heating oil supplier for an inspection of your system before using.** The tank may have shifted or fallen from the stand and fuel lines may have kinked or weakened. Heat from the fire may have caused the tank to warp or bulge. Non-vented tanks are more likely to bulge or show signs of stress. The fire may have loosened or damaged fittings and filters.

**Vehicles**

If your vehicle has been damaged by the fire, contact your insurance agent. Do not attempt to dispose of your vehicle at the landfill; it will not be accepted.

**Naturally Occurring Asbestos (Serpentine Rock)**

Naturally occurring asbestos (NOA) is often found in serpentine rock formations and is present in several foothill areas of Placer County. When NOA containing material is disturbed, asbestos fibers may be released and become airborne, thereby creating a potential health hazard. The fire area is among those in the foothill region affected. The hazards are controllable through the dust measures normally used, such as water suppression.

- Dust control should be applied during wildfire debris clean up activities in areas where NOA may be present.
- Dust control requirements for construction, grading, and excavation activities must comply with Air District Rule 228 – Fugitive Dust.
- Information on areas most likely to have naturally-occurring asbestos, Rule 228, and Asbestos Dust Mitigation Plan Guidance, are available by calling the Air Pollution Control District at (530) - 745-2330 or on-line at [www.placer.ca.gov/apcd](http://www.placer.ca.gov/apcd) .

**Power Loss: Food Disposal**

Double bag the spoiled food and dispose with the garbage. Remove the garbage as soon as possible to prevent undesirable odors and insect or rodent infestations. Store sealed trash bags in the trash cans with tight fitting lids or in watertight dumpsters.

**Contact Information:**

<u>Company/Agency</u>	<u>Phone Number</u>	<u>For information on:</u>
WPWMA	(916) 543-3960	Landfill pricing, disposal
Placer County Environmental Health	(530) 745-2300	Food Safety, hazardous waste, proper waste handling.
Auburn Placer Disposal Service	(530) 885-3735	Debris collection services

Portions of this document were excerpted from the American Red Cross's pamphlet:  
What to do After a Wildfire