



News Release

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Cleaning Up Wildfire Ash Safely

CDPH Recommends Ways to Avoid Potential Health Hazards

SACRAMENTO - The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) is warning people to be especially careful when cleaning up ash left by wildfires. The ash may contain many toxic substances, including arsenic, asbestos, lead and fine particles that can aggravate asthma and other respiratory problems.

“It’s important to limit the amount of ash that gets airborne. Leaf blowers and sweeping may seem like a smart way to clean up, but doing so can stir up ash and people may breathe it in, which is dangerous,” said Dr. Karen Smith, CDPH Director and State Public Health Officer. “It’s also important to avoid skin contact with ash because of the chemicals and toxins it may contain.”

Symptoms that may be related to exposure to ash or soot include itchy eyes, coughing, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing, wheezing, chest tightness or pain, palpitations, headaches and nausea, unusual fatigue or lightheadedness. CDPH recommends these tips for safely cleaning up ash:

- Never use a leaf blower, as it will spread the ash and blow it back into the air.
- Wear a close-fitting respirator rated N-95 or P-100 to block ash particles from being inhaled. Bandanas, surgical or cloth masks do not effectively block fine particles.
- Wear protective gloves, long-sleeved shirts, long pants, socks and shoes to avoid skin contact with ash.
- Remove shoes before entering your home or use “sticky mats” in entryways to remove dust and ash from your shoes. Sticky mats are sold at hardware stores.
- If you do get ash on your skin, wash it off as soon as possible.
- Do not let children play in ash and wash off toys before children play with them.
- Keep pets out of ash areas. Pets exposed to ash should be cleaned or bathed.

For more detailed information on how to safely clean up wildfire ash, visit [CDPH's website](#).