



**COUNTY OF NEVADA  
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*Health Effects from Home and Building 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. AVOID direct contact with ash. If you get ash on your skin, in your eyes, or in your mouth, wash it off as soon as you can. Ash from burned structures is generally more hazardous than forest ash. Fire ash contains tiny particles (dust, dirt, soot) that can be deposited on indoor and outdoor surfaces and can be inhaled if the ash becomes airborne. Ash may contain traces of hazardous chemicals such as metals like lead, cadmium, nickel and arsenic; asbestos from older homes or other buildings; perfluorochemicals (from degradation of non-stick cookware, for example); flame retardants; and caustic materials. For these reasons, it is advisable to be cautious and avoid exposure to the ash.

**Health Effects of Ash:** Fire ash may be irritating to the skin, nose, and throat, and may cause coughing and/or nose bleeds. Fine particles can be inhaled deeply into lungs and may aggravate asthma and make it difficult to breathe. If the ash contains asbestos, nickel, arsenic or cadmium, then exposure is a particular concern because these substances can cause cancer. Because the substances in the ash vary, it is best to be cautious.

**Sensitive People:** People with asthma or other lung diseases, pregnant women, and the elderly should exercise special caution because they may be more susceptible to health effects from the ash.

**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 if they have been in contaminated areas. However, it is best to not allow pets in these areas due to the potential risk to their health and their ability to spread outside of contaminated areas.

**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 or irritation on skin. Change your 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 mask. This type of mask can be purchased from most hardware stores. A mask rated N-95 is much 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, manufacturers do not recommend their use for children. If your child is in an area that warrants wearing a mask, you should remove them from that area to an environment with cleaner air. Persons with heart or lung disease should consult their physician before using a mask during post-fire cleanup.

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