

Precautions When Assessing Your Property After a Fire

January 10, 2025

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH



Areas that have been affected by the wildfire are impacted by smoke, soot, ash, chemicals, water, and structural damage. Before entering any area heavily damaged or destroyed by a wildfire, be sure that the local fire department has cleared the area and allowed entry. Once you can enter a burned-out area, please take appropriate precautions and be aware of hazards to your health and safety.

Additional guidance regarding returning home after a fire can be found at:

<http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/eh/safety/returning-home-after-fire.htm>

ASSUME ALL POWER LINES ARE LIVE UNTIL CLEARED BY YOUR POWER UTILITY

- Stay away from damaged or fallen power lines and power poles.
- Your utility service providers may have turned off your supply of natural gas, electricity, and drinking water due to this fire.
- Your building and safety agency may post a notice on your damaged structure with directions for your protection. Please follow the posted notice.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT NEEDED BEFORE ENTERING THE AREA

RESPIRATORY PROTECTION

- Wear respiratory protection (N-95 or P-100 masks) when entering the burn area to reduce exposure to ash. Think of ash like fine, dangerous dust that can be inhaled deep into the lungs and can cause major problems everywhere it lands. It's not just dirt.
- N-95 masks should be properly fitted, with no gaps around the edges. The mask must cover both the nose and mouth to help prevent you from breathing in dust and ash. An improperly fitted mask is the same as wearing no mask at all.
 - **IMPORTANT REMINDERS:** Follow label instructions on package for proper use. N-95 or P-100 masks may make it harder to breath, especially for those with lung or heart disease.
- Lingering smoke and fire ash can worsen a person's respiratory or heart issues. Smoke can irritate the skin, nose, throat, lungs, and eyes, and cause coughing, wheezing, and difficulty breathing. These symptoms may be significant depending on the type of soot/ash, amount of exposure, and underlying respiratory and heart conditions. **Pay attention to how you are feeling.**

PROTECTIVE CLOTHING, GLOVES, AND BOOTS

- At a minimum, wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants, or coveralls, garden or leather gloves.
- Wear safety shoes or sturdy close-toed, high-ankle leather shoes if burn debris (i.e., broken glass, metal, wood, etc.) is in the area.

EYE, FACE, AND HEAD PROTECTION

- Wear safety glasses or goggles.
- Protective helmets or hard hats are recommended for areas where there is a risk of overhead hazards.

HEARING PROTECTION

- Ear plugs or safety earmuffs should be used if heavy machinery or power tools are being used by emergency crews near you.

LOOK OUT FOR AND AVOID THE FOLLOWING HAZARDS WHEN ENTERING THE AREA

- Damaged or fallen power lines.
- Ash, soot, and contaminated debris.
- Unstable structures.
- Sharp objects such as nails, metal, concrete, or wood debris.
- Slip, trip, and fall hazards such as unstable structures, open pits, or wet and slippery surfaces.
- Household hazardous materials such as kitchen and bathroom cleaning products, paint, alkaline batteries, lithium batteries, pesticides, herbicides, propane cylinders, fuel containers, lithium battery storage systems, and electrical vehicles that have been partially damaged or destroyed.
- Confined or poorly ventilated areas where carbon monoxide may be present from the operation of pumps, generators, or pressure washers.

FIRE ASH

Ash deposited by wildland fires can be extremely dangerous to health. .

- Disturbing ash can be irritating to the skin, nose, and throat, and may cause coughing and difficulty breathing.
- Do not use leaf blowers or shop vacuums and avoid vigorous sweeping, which can create a dangerous cloud of ash.

WHEN LEAVING THE AREA, DO THE FOLLOWING

- Remove ash and debris from skin, hair, clothing, and shoes, using a cloth to gently blot and remove the contaminants.

For additional information on the health effects of wildfire smoke, please visit:

<https://www.cdc.gov/wildfires/risk-factors/>