



For Immediate Release:

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Health Advisory:
Practice Safe Clean-up After a Fire
Public Health provides tips for safe clean-up following a fire

LOS ANGELES – The Los Angeles County Health Officer, Dr. Jonathan E. Fielding, advises all individuals to take precautions during clean-up following a fire. Ash, soot, dust, and other airborne particles may have been deposited inside and outside of homes and businesses. While ash from wildfires is relatively non-toxic and similar to ash that may be found in a home fireplace, it may be irritating to the skin, nose and throat. Exposure to ash in air might trigger asthmatic attacks in people who already have asthma.

"After a wildfire, it is difficult to tell where ash or soot will go, or how winds will affect the level of dust particles in the air, so we ask all individuals to be aware of their immediate environment and how it might affect their health," said Jonathan E. Fielding, MD, MPH, Director of Public Health and Health Officer. "We also advise you to inspect your kitchen following a fire or power outage to prevent foodborne illness. When smoke is heavy for a prolonged period of time, fine particles can build up indoors even though you may not be able to see them."

Ash Clean-up:

- Do not allow children to play in ash, especially in wet or damp ash.
- Wash toys before children play with them.
- Bathe pets to rid them of ash.
- During clean-up, wear gloves such as household dish washing gloves, long sleeved shirts and long pants to avoid skin contact. If you do get ash on your skin, wash it off as soon as possible.
- If you have a vegetable garden or fruit trees, wash the fruit or vegetables thoroughly before eating them.
- Avoid getting ash into the air as much as possible. Do not use leaf blowers or take other actions that will put ash into the air. Instead, gentle sweeping of indoor and outdoor surfaces, followed by wet mopping, is the best way to clean an area with ash. A solution of bleach and water may be used to disinfect an area, if desired.
- Shop vacuums and regular household vacuum cleaners do not filter out small particles, but instead blow such particles into the air where they can be breathed. Use of regular vacuums is not advised however HEPA-filter vacuums could be used.
- A dust mask, such as a surgical mask or a mask rated N-95, may be worn during clean-up to avoid breathing in ash and other airborne particles.
- Avoid washing ash into storm drains whenever possible. Use as little water as possible when cleaning an area of ash.
- Collected ash may be disposed of in the regular trash by placing it in a plastic trash bag first.



- If a job appears to be too big, hire a professional cleaning service. There are several businesses in LA County that specialize in post-fire clean-up that may be found in the phone book. Please contact a professional if there is substantial damage or destruction to a structure.

Food Safety:

Some homeowners may have experienced a power outage or could find that their kitchens have ash, soot, dust, and other airborne particles. Follow these recommendations to avoid foodborne illness:

- Plastic bottles of liquid, such as water, that have been covered with ash should be discarded. It is not enough to rinse off the bottle as these particles contaminate the caps, making them very difficult to decontaminate.
- Food that has not been stored in waterproof or airtight containers and has been covered with ash should be discarded. This includes products that have been stored in cardboard or other soft packaging.
- Food stored in sealed, previously unopened glass or metal cans or jars, such as baby food, should be safe for use. Clean before opening and transfer the contents to another container before eating.
- Generally, food in the refrigerator is safe as long as the power outage is short. Food can be held in the fridge for a few hours if, while the power is out, the doors to the fridge and freezer are kept closed to maintain coldest possible temperatures.
- If a power outage lasts several hours, it is best to throw away perishable food items such as meat, dairy products and eggs.
- Items that have defrosted in the freezer should be thrown away. Do not re-freeze thawed food.
- All other food items should be inspected to ensure safety. If in doubt, throw it out.

The Department of Public Health is committed to protecting and improving the health of the nearly 10 million residents of Los Angeles County. Through a variety of programs, community partnerships and services, Public Health oversees environmental health, disease control, and community and family health. Public Health comprises nearly 4,000 employees and has an annual budget exceeding \$750 million. To learn more about Public Health and the work we do please visit <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov>, visit our YouTube channel at <http://www.youtube.com/lapublichealth>, find us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/lapublichealth>, or follow us on Twitter: @LAPublicHealth.

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