



# Emergency Cleanup Guidance for Wildfires & Disasters



## Handling Ash, Debris and other Hazardous Materials from Burned Structures

Ash, charred debris, and other contaminated materials from burned structures may contain hazardous wastes. To minimize exposure to emergency personnel, the general public, and workers involved with restoration efforts, and to minimize dispersion to the air and run-off to surrounding surface waters, the ash and contaminated debris should be cleaned up and properly disposed of as quickly as possible. Actions taken to immediately mitigate and contain and control hazardous waste releases are exempt from hazardous waste permit requirements (22 CCR 66270.1(c)(3)(A)) after the Governor has declared the County in a State of Emergency. This document provides general guidance for the management of these materials. This guidance applies only to the emergency actions taken to clean up, contain and dispose of the ash and debris from the burned structures. This guidance does not apply to long term restoration activities.

During emergency cleanup efforts, restoration workers must evaluate readily identifiable hazardous wastes and determine if they can be safely segregated and managed separately from the ash and debris. If hazardous material cannot be separated safely, it is permissible to contain and dispose of these materials with the ash and contaminated debris. Uncontaminated and unburned hazardous materials (i.e., hazardous materials with smoke damage from partially burned structures) should not be commingled with ash and debris. These materials should be segregated and directed to local hazardous waste collection programs.

### Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):

To ensure the safety of homeowners as they access their home sites, we recommend that all personnel accessing the home sites wear appropriate personal protection. This should include: long-sleeve shirt and trousers to minimize skin exposure to fire ash and other particulate debris; appropriate puncture / crush-resistant footwear, garden gloves to protect hands; hard hats when working with debris or other materials overhead and safety glasses or goggles to protect the eyes from physical damage or exposure to dusts. At all times while on the property, homeowners should wear a dust mask (N-95 equivalent respirator or better). To ensure ash and other contaminants are not disseminated elsewhere outside the burned areas and/or vehicles, the PPE should be taken off prior to entering the vehicle and/or leaving the area. For more information on ash cleanup and food safety after a fire, go to [www.publichealth.lacounty.gov](http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov) and read the health advisory "*Practice safe cleanup after a fire*".

### Ash and Debris from Residential and Commercial Structures:

Ash and contaminated debris from residential structures should be contained and disposed of at a municipal solid waste landfill (class three) under the direction of the local solid waste enforcement agency. Ash and contaminated debris from commercial structures must also be contained and disposed of as quickly as possible to minimize exposure. In addition, it is more likely that hazardous materials and hazardous wastes will be found and need to be segregated from the ash and contaminated debris at commercial structures. Generally, ash and contaminated debris from these structures may be handled in the same manner as ash from residential structures.

## **Industrial Type Businesses Structures:**

Ash and contaminated debris from these structures should be cleaned up and contained as quickly as possible. Debris from this type of business is more likely to contain hazardous waste residues not typically found in the municipal solid waste stream; and therefore, disposal to a municipal solid waste landfill (class three) may not be appropriate for these materials. The Los Angeles County Fire Dept. Health Hazardous Materials Division should be contacted if assistance is needed with ash, debris or site evaluation from such premises prior to containment.

## **Segregated Wastes:**

Segregated hazardous wastes should be transferred to local household hazardous waste collection programs as soon as feasible. Most businesses affected by the fires will have lost all records that can be used to establish monthly generation rates. Therefore, unless the business was obviously not a small quantity commercial source, DTSC recommends that local household hazardous waste collection programs accept hazardous wastes from affected commercial sources to facilitate the safe removal of the hazardous materials.

## **Examples of Segregated Wastes:**

The following are examples of materials that should be separated to ensure safe handling and disposal of ash and debris:

- Compressed gas cylinders and propane cylinders
- Gasoline cans (and other fuel containers)
- Bulk chemicals & chemical containers
- Lead acid batteries
- Paints and thinners
- Bulk pesticides & fertilizers
- Munitions
- Electrical transformers
- Air conditioners
- Large metal appliances, lawn mowers, tractors, chainsaws, ATVs, etc.
- Automobiles

## **Disposal of Used Propane Containers**

Empty propane tanks may be managed and disposed as nonhazardous waste. Contact your propane distributor for location to return empty or damaged tanks. It would be more beneficial however, for the homeowner to have the tank refilled or sent to a scrap metal recycler rather than disposing of the tank. Partially full propane tanks must be managed and disposed as hazardous waste. Homeowners needing assistance on disposing propane tank may call the Health HazMat Division of the Los Angeles County Fire Department at 323-890-4317.

## **Household Waste Roundup:**

The County of Los Angeles offers its residents free, convenient and environmentally safe means to dispose of household hazardous and electronic waste (HHW/E-Waste). The residents may utilize the weekly mobile events or the permanent collection centers to dispose of their HHW/E-Waste. Please note that it is illegal to transport more than 15 gallons or 125 pounds of household hazardous waste per trip. HHW/E-Waste from businesses is not accepted. For further information in English or Spanish, please visit [www.888CleanLA.com](http://www.888CleanLA.com) or call 1(888)CLEAN LA.

**This guidance is general in nature; specific situations may require additional considerations. If specific questions arise, please contact: Los Angeles County Fire Dept., Health Hazardous Materials Division at (323) 890-4317 Mon. to Fri. 8am to 5pm.**