



## Protect yourself and your family: Re-entering areas burned by wildfire safely



Your home may be impacted by smoke, soot and ash, chemicals, structural damage and water damage. Before entering any areas that were heavily damaged or destroyed by the wildfire, be sure that the local fire department has cleared the area and it is safe to do so. Once you are able to enter burned out areas, take appropriate precautions and be aware of hazards to your health and safety.

### What hazards should I watch for?

- Slip, trip and fall hazards from unstable structures, open pits or wet and slippery surfaces.
- Sharp objects such as nails, metal, concrete or wood debris.
- Ash, soot and demolition dust.
- Hazardous materials such as kitchen and bathroom cleaning products, paint, batteries, and pesticide, herbicide and fuel containers which 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. Be careful entering tight spaces.
- Propane cylinders for heating or from BBQ appliances.
- Damaged or fallen power lines

### Fire Ash

The ash deposited by forest fires is relatively nontoxic and similar to ash that might be found in your fireplace. However, any ash will contain small amounts of cancer-causing chemicals. Fire ash may be:

- Irritating to the skin, especially to those with sensitive skin.
- Irritating to the nose and throat and may cause coughing.
- A trigger of asthmatic attacks in people who already have asthma.

### What Personal Protective equipment (PPE) should I use to enter burned out areas?

Adapted from Information from First Nations Health Authority- Canada

- PPE helps to reduce exposure to hazards. Use PPE when entering your home.
- Select PPE based upon the situation and work to be done.

#### **Breathing Protection:**

- Use N95 rated masks to help filter out and reduce exposure to fine dust particles such as ash, soot, and other nuisance-type particles. The mask must cover both the nose and mouth to keep you from breathing in dust and ash. A mask rated N95, blocks about 95 percent of particles that are 0.3 microns in size or larger.
- If you cannot locate N95 masks, a well-fitting dust or surgical mask may provide some protection during cleanup. Many ash particles are larger than found in smoke, and a dust mask can significantly reduce the amount of particles inhaled.

#### **Protective Clothing, Gloves and boots:**

- At minimum, wear long sleeve shirts, long pants, or coveralls, leather gloves and boots with thick soles to prevent punctures from sharp objects.

#### **Eye, Face and Head Protection**

- Wear safety glasses or goggles which provide wrap-around protection.
- Protective helmets or hard-hats are recommended for clean-up of areas where there is a risk of falling debris due to structural damage to the home.

#### **Hearing Protection**

- Ear plugs or safety ear muffs should be used when operating heavy machinery or power tools.

#### **Turning on Utilities:**

- Wear the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) including masks, gloves and boots.
- Never try to turn utilities back on until they have been checked first by your local utility provider and they have told you it is safe to do so. It is possible that your utility service providers may have had to turn off the supply of natural gas, electricity and drinking water as a result of this fire.
- Do not try to use any electrical appliances or power in your home or garage that may have come in contact with fire, water or fire retardant until they have been checked and cleared for use by a qualified electrician.
- Water system components should be checked for damage. A reputable company and qualified personnel should be used for any repairs. Prior to using your water system for consumption (drinking, cooking or bathing), flush the system to remove all stagnant water from the water lines. Run all cold and hot water taps for at least 5 minutes before you use them, even if the water is not hot.

- Stay away from damaged or fallen power lines and power poles.

#### **Protection for Family Members with chronic respiratory disease**

- In particular, people with asthma or respiratory conditions should only spend short periods of time in these areas and wear respiratory protection.
- Lingering smoke and fire ash at home and yard can worsen a person's respiratory issues. Smoke can irritate the skin, nose, throat, lungs and eyes and can cause coughing and wheezing. These symptoms may be significant depending on the type of soot/ash, amount of exposure, and underlying respiratory conditions.
- For more information on the health effects from wildfire smoke, please see:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/features/wildfires/>