

## Health and Safety Concerns for Property Cleanup

The Butte Firestorms created substantial destruction and devastation. For this reason, the County of Butte is acting now to respond to the consequences of such a disaster, including the generation of extraordinary amounts of ash and debris. To ensure public health and safety, the County is working collaboratively with state and federal agencies to address debris cleanup and other recovery issues. The following general guidance is provided to persons whose property has been affected.

The Public Health Department warns property owners who wish to conduct ash and debris cleanup themselves that significant health hazards may be present when handling ash, debris, and household hazardous waste. Experience from similar fires in California has shown that asbestos, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), heavy metal residues, and other hazardous substances may be present in burn ash and debris.

Due to these hazards, the Public Health Department recommends that site cleanup be conducted by appropriately licensed professional contractors.

Appropriate safety and environmental precautions must be followed by all debris removal contractors, including:

- Specific contractor licensing and training requirements.
- Dust control
- Traffic control
- Worker health and safety, including personal protective equipment
- Proper disposal requirements

**The Public Health Department does not recommend that property owners conduct their own cleanup** due to the significant health and safety hazards that may be present at individual sites. If property owners decide to proceed with cleanup despite this warning, appropriate personal protective equipment should be utilized to reduce exposure to hazardous materials. The following general information is provided to inform persons who chose to perform cleanup on their own property, in the selection of appropriate personal protective equipment.

- **Respiratory protection:** A NIOSH approved particulate respirator can provide protection against dust and ash. If asbestos may be present a “HEPA” respirator (N100) will provide a greater level of protection. Note that respirators are only effective if they fit correctly so as to provide an effective seal around the face.
- **Gloves:** Nitrile or equivalent inner gloves may be worn under work gloves to provide protection if paints or solvents must be handled.
- **Disposable coveralls:** “Tyvek” or other equivalent disposable coveralls may be worn, and disposed of prior to entering vehicles or structures to reduce the potential to contaminate these areas or expose others.

- **Footwear:** Steel toed rubber boots, or steel toed work boots with disposable booties are appropriate. Potentially contaminated footwear should not be worn into residences or other structures unless rinsed off first.
- **Hardhat & goggles or protective glasses:** Hardhats are recommended when working with debris or other materials overhead. Protective goggles that seal against the face offer the most protection from splashing chemicals or thick dust. Protective glasses with shatterproof lenses (ANSI approved) are recommended on all construction or clean up sites.

Property owners and other site workers should take precautions to avoid heat stress, which can be significantly increased when wearing personal protective equipment. Care should be exercised to recognize and avoid physical hazards such as downed and potentially live electrical wiring, open excavations, uneven footing, overhead hazards, and equipment that may be operating in the area.

If water is available, ash should be wetted (not soaked) to prevent airborne emissions, especially during handling operations. Ash **should not** be saturated to the point of runoff.

Property owners should also keep children, pets and livestock out of areas with ash and debris from burned structures and debris, to protect their health and reduce tracking of ash and debris into vehicles and structures.

If you have any questions, please contact the Environmental Health Division of the Butte County Public Health Department at 202 Mira Loma Drive, Oroville, telephone 538-7281.