



NEWS

Sept. 9, 2020

For Immediate Release

SMC Health Officer Declares Health Emergency Due to Fires *Action allows access to private property for hazardous waste clean up*

Redwood City – San Mateo County Health Officer Scott Morrow today declared a local health emergency in response to the CZU Lightning Complex fires after determining that hazardous waste that may be on site is an immediate threat to public health.

The Board of Supervisors will ratify and extend the emergency declaration at its regular Sept. 15, 2020, meeting. The Board also proclaimed a local emergency due to the fires on Aug. 19.

The declaration may free up additional funding and bolsters an Aug. 28 emergency regulation to allow temporary access to private property for damage assessments. The new declaration further clarifies that County staff and contractors can enter private property as necessary to remediate hazardous waste or waste that could become hazardous.

Debris and ash from structure fires can contain hazardous substances such as building materials or chemicals from household items.

“The emergency declaration will help ensure the safety of our residents as they return home, as well as our environment, by facilitating the removal of toxic metals and hazardous materials from the burned areas,” said Environmental Health Services Director Heather Forshey.

To date, the CZU Lightning Complex fires that began Aug. 16, 2020, have covered 86,509 acres across both San Mateo and Santa Cruz counties. To date, the fire is 83 percent contained but in San Mateo County has destroyed 59 structures due to the initial assessment.

For more information on the fire recovery and Environmental Health resources for safely returning home, visit <https://www.smcgov.org/smc-wildfire-recovery>

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