



## RETURNING HOME AFTER A WILDFIRE

Once a wildfire has burned through an area, many dangers may remain. Follow these precautions when returning home.

### GENERAL SAFETY TIPS

- ✓ Please leave debris and ash as undisturbed as possible, pending further instructions. Do not transport ash or debris to landfills or transfer stations at this time. These recommendations are in place to protect the health of anyone who may come into contact with the waste, including solid waste facility employees, solid waste haulers, and the public.
- ✓ Wear personal protective equipment and gear when sorting through possessions. Anything in contact with ash should be sanitized and cleaned (see below).
- ✓ Avoid contact with hazardous chemicals (propane tanks, cleaners, pesticides, etc.)
- ✓ Be aware of slip, trip, fall, and puncture hazards.
- ✓ Avoid damaged or fallen power poles or lines.
- ✓ Visually check the stability of trees.
- ✓ Be aware of damaged septic tanks, lids/covers might be missing and can be a fall hazard.

### HEALTH AND SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

- ✓ Fire ash may be irritating to the skin, nose, and throat, and may cause coughing and/or nose bleeds. Fine particles can be inhaled deeply into lungs and may aggravate asthma and may make it difficult to breathe.
- ✓ Wear puncture resistant shoes, gloves, long-sleeved shirts, and long pants to avoid skin contact. Goggles are recommended. Contact with wet ash may cause chemical burns or irritation on skin. Change your shoes and clothing prior to leaving the site, to avoid tracking ash into your car, home, etc.
- ✓ When exposure to dust or ash cannot be avoided, use air-purifying respirators such as an N-95 mask. Due to COVID-19, only N-95 masks that do not have one-way-valves should be used, unless you cover the valve with a face covering.
- ✓ Please do not allow children or pets into the burned area. Even if care is exercised, it is easy to stir up ash that may contain hazardous substances and increase everyone's potential exposure, as well as spread contamination. If contact is unavoidable, be sure to clean off any ash prior to leaving the area.
- ✓ Wash your hands frequently, both to prevent the spread of germs, as well as prevent ingesting any potentially toxic ash. If you do not have safe water available on-site, please be sure to bring washing water and soap with you.

### WATER

- ✓ If your drinking water well was impacted by the fire, seek professional well services and notify your local permitting agency if applicable.
- ✓ If you suspect, or have been told, your water is contaminated, do not use your water to wash dishes, brush your teeth, wash and prepare food, wash your hands, make ice, or make baby formula. Use bottled or boiled water instead.



## FOOD SAFETY

Foods exposed to fire can be compromised. Reheating food that has become contaminated will not make it safe – When in doubt, throw it out!

- ✓ Food in cans, jars, and bottles may appear to be okay, but the heat from the fire may cause small ruptures that will allow bacteria or other contamination to enter the container, making the food unsafe. Even if the container remains sealed, the heat from the fire may activate food spoilage bacteria.
- ✓ Throw away any food in permeable containers (cardboard, plastic wrap, etc.) or unpackaged food that was exposed to heat or smoke, as toxic fumes can permeate the packaging and contaminate the food. Even food stored in your refrigerator may become contaminated.

## CLEANING AND SANITIZING

Cleaning and sanitizing your household after an emergency is important to help prevent the spread of illness, disease and exposure to toxic ash. Clean and sanitize surfaces in a four-step process:

- ✓ Wash with soap and hot, clean water.
- ✓ Rinse with clean water.
- ✓ Sanitize by immersing for 1 minute in a solution of 1 cup (8 oz/240 mL) of unscented household chlorine bleach in 5 gallons of clean water.
- ✓ Allow to air dry.

Please remember to NEVER mix bleach with ammonia or any other cleaner, wear rubber or other non-porous gloves, and eye protection, and try not to breathe in product fumes. If using products indoors, open windows and doors to allow fresh air to enter.

## HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

- ✓ Household hazardous waste, such as cleaners, pesticides, and batteries must be handled separately from other burn debris and cannot go into a landfill or into regular trash containers. Products labeled Caution, Warning, Danger, Poison, Toxic, Flammable, Combustible, or Corrosive are considered hazardous. If any container with these labels is damaged, please handle with caution or leave them in place, pending additional guidance from San Mateo County Environmental Health Services.
- ✓ If you have a propane tank system, do not use it until it has been inspected by your supplier. Turn off valves on the system and contact your supplier. Leave valves closed until the supplier inspects your system. Tanks, brass and copper fittings and lines may have been damaged from the heat and be unsafe.
- ✓ If you have a heating oil tank system, do not use it, until it has been inspected by your supplier. The tank may have shifted or fallen from the stand and fuel lines may have kinked or weakened. Heat from the fire may have damaged the tank or lines.