

Public Information Officer (PIO) Advisory

Post-Fire Hazards on Residential and Industrial Properties

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

As firefighters continue suppression and damage assessment operations following the Spokane Area fires, residents, business owners, and contractors are urged to recognize that burned properties may contain hazardous materials long after the flames have been extinguished.

Burned Ash Is Not Just Dirt

Ash from burned homes, garages, vehicles, businesses, and industrial facilities may contain hazardous substances, including:

- Heavy metals such as lead, arsenic, and mercury
- Asbestos fibers from older building materials
- Crystalline silica from concrete, masonry, and glass
- Burned plastics, synthetic materials, treated wood, and roofing products
- Chemicals from household cleaners, pesticides, fuels, paints, batteries, and industrial products

These contaminants can become airborne when disturbed and may be inhaled or spread to neighboring properties.

Protect Yourself Before Entering Burned Property

Before returning to or cleaning a burned property:

- Wait until local authorities determine it is safe to enter.
- Wear a properly fitted **NIOSH-approved N95 or P100 respirator** if ash or dust is present.
- Wear gloves, long sleeves, pants, sturdy boots, and eye protection.
- Keep children, older adults, and pets away from burned structures and ash deposits.

Avoid Creating Airborne Dust

Do not:

- Use leaf blowers to remove ash.

- Dry sweep ash with brooms.
- Use standard household vacuums, which can redistribute fine hazardous particles.

Instead:

- Lightly mist ash with water to minimize dust without creating runoff.
- Use HEPA-filtered vacuums specifically designed for fine particulate cleanup when appropriate.
- Follow local guidance for disposal of fire debris and contaminated materials.

Industrial and Commercial Properties

Owners and employees should recognize that burned industrial and commercial sites may contain additional hazards, including:

- Damaged chemical storage areas
- Burned fuel systems and compressed gas cylinders
- Contaminated runoff and hazardous waste
- Structural instability and compromised utilities
- Energized electrical equipment and damaged infrastructure

These sites should be evaluated by qualified personnel before cleanup or reentry begins.

Structural Hazards Remain

Even after a fire is extinguished, damaged structures may have:

- Unstable walls and chimneys
- Collapsed roofs or weakened floors
- Hidden hot spots
- Exposed nails, broken glass, and sharp metal debris
- Downed electrical lines and damaged gas service

Never enter a structure that has not been evaluated and deemed safe by appropriate authorities.

Protect Your Neighborhood

Wind can carry contaminated ash beyond burned properties. Residents can help reduce community exposure by:

- Keeping ash damp during cleanup.
- Covering debris loads during transport.
- Following local disposal instructions.
- Washing hands, clothing, shoes, and equipment after working in burned areas.
- Preventing ash from entering storm drains, streams, and waterways.

If You Experience Symptoms

Leave the area immediately and seek cleaner air if you develop:

- Persistent coughing
- Difficulty breathing
- Eye irritation
- Chest discomfort
- Dizziness or nausea

Individuals with asthma, COPD, heart disease, or weakened immune systems should avoid burned areas whenever possible.

The Spokane Area fire response remains committed to protecting the health and safety of our communities. Fire hazards do not end when the flames are out. Exercise caution, follow official guidance, and allow trained personnel to assess hazardous areas before beginning cleanup operations.