



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – June 15, 2011

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## **SAFE TIPS ON WILDFIRE ASH CLEANUP**

The recent wildfire has deposited large amount of ash on indoor and outdoor surfaces in areas near the fire. In general the wildfire ash is relatively nontoxic and similar to ash that might be found in your fireplace. It may cause irritation of the skin, nose, and throat, and may cause coughing. Breathing in ash might trigger asthmatic attacks in people who already have asthma or lung diseases. To avoid potential health problems, the following is recommended:

- You can clean it yourself with your normal household cleaning products such as mild detergent and water. Homes do not need to be professionally cleaned
- Do not allow children to play in the ash
- Wash off children's toys before children play with them
- Wash any home-grown fruits or vegetables before eating
- Avoid spreading the ash in the air: wet down the ash with small amounts of water before attempting to remove. Do not use leaf blowers or shop vacuums. Vacuums with HEPA filters should be used if available
- Collect ash in plastic bags and dispose in the regular trash, unless you suspect hazardous waste is present – in which case you should contact your local hazardous waste authority regarding appropriate disposal
- Personal protection:
  - Wear protective glasses or goggles to protect your eyes
  - Keep material/waste wet to prevent dust from becoming airborne
  - Use a well-fitted, NIOSH-certified air-purifying respirator (such as an N-95 or more protective respirator) to reduce the effects of dust and ash.
  - People with lung or heart disease should consult with their physician before post fire clean-up.
  - Wear gloves, long sleeved shirt and long pants to protect your skin

Ash and debris from the burned structures may contain more toxic substances than wildfire fire ash because of the many synthetic and other materials present in buildings. Older buildings in particular may contain asbestos and lead. A more cautious approach should be taken in the removal of ash and other debris from inside burned structures. A [NIOSH Interim fact sheet](#) addresses burned structure clean up safety.