



## Public Health Department

### Environmental Health

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## HEALTH AND SAFETY PRECAUTIONS FOR RE-ENTRY AND CLEAN UP AFTER FIRE

### Debris and Hazardous Waste

- Fire damage can create significant health and safety hazards that may be present at individual properties. **It is recommended that structure ash is not disturbed by sorting or sifting due to potential exposure to toxic materials.** If you choose to visit your property, please consider the following:
  - Wear sturdy shoes (steel toes and shanks are recommended) and clothing
  - Hazardous chemicals and conditions may be present
  - Inspect propane tanks for visible damage before turning on
  - Cover all clothing when in proximity to ash. Wear gloves, long-sleeved shirts, and long pants to avoid skin contact, whenever possible. Goggles should be worn. Contact with wet ash may cause chemical burns or irritation on skin. Change your shoes and clothing prior to leaving the decontamination site, to avoid tracking ash into your car, home, etc.
  - Anything in contact with ash should be cleaned and sanitized. **Sorting through/cleaning burn debris is not recommended.**
  - Be aware of slip, trip, fall, puncture and overhead hazards.
  - Do not use leaf blowers or do any activities that will put ash into the air.
  - Wear a close fitting respirator mask that is rated N-95 or P-100 to block particles from ash or smoke from being inhaled. N-95 respirators are well-fitted when they do not come into contact with facial hair; strap tension is adequate, not overly tightened; and masks fit across the nose bridge. A tight seal would not be possible for most children, even with a small adult-size model. People with heart or lung disease should consult their physician before using a respirator.
  - The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) is the only agency that certifies respirators to determine that they adequately protect people. Look for NIOSH approval on the package or label.

### Do not remove ash and debris without approval from the Environmental Health Division

- The county is working with various state and federal partners who will assess each property for household hazardous waste and asbestos and remove those materials from each property. After the property has been cleared of hazardous waste, the property owner can either sign up for a state debris removal program or perform their own cleanup under oversight of the Environmental Health Department. The hazardous waste and debris removal program through the state and federal programs will not have any out of pocket costs for the property owner. The cleanup requirements for property owner cleanup are under development.



### Food Safety

- Perishable food items that have not been properly stored (at or below 41 °F) for more than four hours is not considered safe and must be thrown out.
- If your home has been damaged and you find non-perishable food items we recommend that you DO NOT use them. The containers may appear to be intact but high temperatures may have caused the seams to fail, resulting in the contents being exposed to potential contamination.
- When In Doubt, Throw It Out!!

### Water Safety

**At this point, water available from your tap should be considered unsafe until the proper water tests can be completed. Boil water notices are in place for all public water systems and will be lifted at some time in the future when water is determined to be safe. If you have a private well, see handout entitled "Well Disinfection & Sampling Information".**

- If your well has been damaged, it may have been exposed to potential contamination and can contaminate surrounding groundwater if not repaired properly. Fire can damage the well casing, electrical conduits and piping. DO NOT use the water for consumption which includes drinking, cooking, dishwashing, oral hygiene, hand washing, bathing and pets.
  - The well must be repaired by a qualified professional, properly disinfected as per Butte County Environmental Health's (BCEH) requirements and then tested to determine the water is safe for consumption.
  - Qualified professionals include licensed well drillers, pump contractors and/or certified distribution operators. Water sampling may be conducted by the Butte County Public Health (BCPH) laboratory or by a local state certified laboratory (FGL and Basic Laboratory in Chico, CA).

### Septic Systems

- Fire could have damaged your septic system. The damage would have most likely occurred to the piping between the house and the septic tank, or from the septic tank to the leach field. Damage sometimes occurs from heavy equipment such as backhoes and bulldozers used to fight the fire or to clean up debris. The repairs to the system must be done by qualified professionals as per BCEH's requirements.