

DUST AND ASBESTOS CONCERNS For Homeowners

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What hazardous substances might be present at my homesite after the fire? Dust and possibly asbestos, if stirred up by wind or by digging around in the debris, can become airborne. Ashes and debris can also contain lead or mercury and organic chemicals released by burning wood and plastics. Avoid breathing dust raised from these locations.

How can I protect myself when handling material at my home site?

- Avoid unnecessary contact with ashes and other burned debris from structure files. If contact is necessary, keep the time of exposure as short as possible.
- Wear a particulate mask designed to protect respiratory system from very fine particles.
- Wet debris during disturbance to reduce the likelihood of particles becoming airborne.
- Wear clothing and shoes that can be discarded after exposure. If you are keeping the clothing, rinse thoroughly before machine washing.
- Shower (including washing hair) thoroughly after exposure.

What are the best ways to clean up in-door smoke?

- Wet cleaning is less likely to raise particles.
- Wipe up dust, ashes, etc. with a wet cloth or paper towel; rinse area to remove residue.
- Steam clean or shampoo carpets and upholstery; wash or steam clean curtains and rugs.
- Do not sweep, dust, or vacuum* (unless using a HEPA (high efficiency particulate) vacuum). These methods tend to disturb the particles, not remove them.

What is the health concern regarding dust and asbestos? Typical symptoms related to short-term exposure to particulates may include itchy eyes, coughing, and upper airway irritation. Other potential health effects may include headache, dizziness, and nausea. People with pre-existing conditions such as asthma or other respiratory problems should avoid exposure. Breathing large amounts of asbestos fibers, especially over an extended period of time, can lead to respiratory disease in some persons exposed.

For further information, contact Kathi Lawrence at 740-3369.