



Plumas County Environmental Health

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HEALTH AND SAFETY PRECAUTIONS FOR RE-ENTRY AND DEBRIS REMOVAL AFTER FIRE

If you visit your property to collect belongings and mementos, please familiarize yourself with the information in this packet. It contains important details about the hazards of entering a fire-impacted area.

BURN AREA CONDITIONS

- In the burn area, you will encounter dangerous conditions and may be exposed to toxic materials, and physical hazards that may include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - Power lines or wires must be treated as energized as they have the potential to cause serious injury, or death
 - Embers & hot ash
 - Hazardous materials such as ash, asbestos, heavy metals, oils, fire retardants, pesticides, and other hazardous materials
 - Puncture hazards such as broken pipes, exposed nails, broken glass, and damaged structural elements
 - Potential explosive hazards such as propane tanks, ammunition, and solvents
 - Slippery surfaces
 - Toxic airborne particles
 - Unstable structures

DEBRIS AND HAZARDOUS WASTE

- Fire damage can create significant health and safety hazards that may be present at individual properties. ***It is recommended to not disturb structure ash due to potential exposure to toxic materials.*** If you choose to visit your property, please consider the following:
 - 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.
 - Wear sturdy shoes (steel toes and shanks are recommended).
 - Hazardous chemicals and conditions may be present.
 - Inspect propane tanks for visible damage before turning on, and check for leaks using a soap solution.
 - Anything in contact with ash should be cleaned and sanitized. ***Sorting through/cleaning fire 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 can be well-fitted when they do not come into contact with facial hair; the strap tension is adequate, but not overly tightened; and masks fit across tightly at the nose bridge. A tight seal may not be possible for 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

The county is working with various state and federal partners to establish a process for the assessment and removal of household hazardous waste and asbestos, as well as structural ash and debris from the fire. This process will be announced to the public upon its completion.

FOOD SAFETY

Some or all of the affected fire areas have not had power since the fire started. Refrigerated food is considered unsafe after a power loss of four (4) or more hours and should be discarded. If you have dry/canned foods that were damaged by heat or water at your home or property, they should be discarded.

- Never taste food to determine safety. You can't rely on appearance or odor to determine food safety.
- If your refrigerator has been non-operational for an extended period of time, the food inside is unsafe.
- Once your refrigerator has been emptied, clean the inside with soap and water, rinse with clean water, then sanitize with water and bleach (1 Tablespoon of bleach per gallon of water).
- For more information regarding food safety during a power outage, refer to the *Maintaining Food Safety During Power Outages* handout at <https://www.plumascounty.us/DocumentCenter/View/12391/Maintaining-Food-Safety?bidId> and the *Food Safety During Power Outages* handout at <https://tinyurl.com/yxnfxzmn>.

WATER SAFETY

If you are served by a public water system, contact your water service provider for information regarding water safety. If your home or business lost water pressure at any point, water available from your tap should be considered unsafe.

- Commercially bottled water should be used for consumption and oral hygiene purposes until your water provider confirms a safe and potable water supply.
- Once your water supply is confirmed to be safe and potable, all water lines serving your home or business should be thoroughly flushed.
- If you are served by a private well, refer to the *Disinfection of Wells & Water Systems* handout at <https://www.plumascounty.us/DocumentCenter/View/1768/Disinfection-of-Wells--Water-Systems?bidId>.
- If your well has been damaged by fire or physical contact, it may expose the well water to contamination if not repaired properly. Fire can damage the well casing, electrical conduits and piping. **DO NOT** use the water from a damaged well for consumption which includes drinking, cooking, dishwashing, oral hygiene, hand washing, bathing and pets.
- If damaged, the well must be repaired by a qualified professional, disinfected, purged of disinfectant (bleach) 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 sample analysis should be conducted by a CA certified laboratory. For a list of local laboratories refer to the *Water Sample Testing Laboratories* handout at https://www.plumascounty.us/DocumentCenter/View/1765/water_sample_testing_labs?bidId.

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, from the septic tank to the leach field, or the plastic septic tank lids and risers (if any). Damage can occur from heavy equipment such as backhoes and bulldozers used to fight the fire or to clean up debris. Repairs to the system must be completed by qualified professionals as per Plumas County Environmental Health's requirements.