

## **Safety Reminders for Wildfire-affected Areas**

### **Protect Yourself and Your Family During Reentry and Cleanup**

North Central Public Health District (NCPHD) and the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), urges residents to take precautions when entering wildfire-affected areas. Even after the fire is out, these areas remain hazardous. Ash and debris may contain toxic chemicals such as pesticides, motor oil, lead paint, heavy metals and asbestos—especially in older homes. DEQ recommends that you do not disturb debris or begin cleanup until the site has been evaluated by hazardous materials professionals.

#### **Key Safety Reminders**

##### **Protecting Children**

Children and the elderly should not be involved in any cleanup activities and should stay out of fire-damaged areas. They are especially vulnerable to wildfire-related hazards, including smoke and ash. Limit their time outdoors if air quality is poor, and use HEPA air filters indoors if available.

##### **Personal Safety Measures**

If you must enter your property, wear an N95 mask, goggles or eye protection, gloves, and disposable Tyvek coveralls. If those are not available, wear long sleeves, pants, and sturdy shoes, and wash or discard clothing immediately after use. Avoid cleanup during windy conditions, as ash and dust can become airborne and hazardous to your health.

##### **Debris Disposal**

Owner-led cleanup of fire debris is strongly discouraged at this time due to the significant health and environmental risks involved. Improper handling can expose residents, neighbors, and cleanup workers to harmful substances and contaminate the environment. In addition, local disposal facilities may not yet be ready to accept these materials. Please **wait for official guidance** and coordinated cleanup efforts. Always confirm with local authorities before removing or transporting any debris from your property.

If you choose to clean up hazardous materials yourself, it will be at your own cost. Removal of household hazardous waste and debris can be an expensive process. NCPHD and the DEQ, **strongly urges property owners to not remove hazardous materials and debris themselves** because of the potential risks to health and safety. If you do choose to take on ash and debris cleanup yourself, NCPHD and DEQ strongly recommends that you hire a DEQ licensed asbestos abatement contractor to do the work, to protect you and your family from the risk of exposure to asbestos.

##### **Stay Alert to Hazards**

Wildfire-affected areas can be dangerous even after the fire is out. Be aware of unstable structures, sharp metal, toxic ash, and underground hazards such as damaged septic systems, which may collapse or expose sewage. Use flags, tape or other markers to identify underground hazards and prevent accidents.

##### **Document Damage**

Before beginning any cleanup, take photos of your property and visible damage, including your well, septic system, buildings, and vehicles. These may be needed for insurance claims and disaster assistance.

##### **Free Protective Gear Available**

NCPHD has free Tyvek coveralls and N95 masks for fire-impacted residents:

- Monday-Friday, 8:30 am- 5 pm at NCPHD.
- Weekends: Available through Mid-Columbia Fire & Rescue

##### **More Information:**

How to safely manage ash and debris from burned buildings: [ordeq.org/afterthefire](https://ordeq.org/afterthefire)  
Advice for returning to a home that survived a wildfire: [ordeq.org/returninghome](https://ordeq.org/returninghome)



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Public Health District**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.