

After a fire: returning home safely

Community information

OFFICIAL

Houses, sheds and other buildings or structures burnt in a bushfire can leave potential health hazards including fallen objects, sharp objects, smouldering coals, damaged electrical wires, leaking gas and weakened walls.

Hazardous materials to be aware of after a fire include:

- asbestos
- ashes, especially from burnt treated timbers (such as copper chrome arsenate or 'CCA')
- dust
- garden or farm chemicals
- LP gas cylinders
- medicines
- metal and other residues from burnt household appliances
- other general chemicals (for example, cleaning products).

Check with your local emergency services that it is safe to return to your property. Where possible, try to avoid taking children onto fire-damaged properties. If you do, ensure they remain protected at all times.

Take care of yourself

Wear protective clothing including:

- sturdy footwear and heavy-duty work gloves
- disposable coveralls (with long sleeves and trousers)
- P2 face masks.

When leaving the property, pack your gloves, coveralls and face mask into a garbage bag. Wash your hands after removing contaminated clothing and articles. Clean your shoes before wearing them again.

For safety reasons, try to limit the time spent at your property. However, if you will be there for an extended period, remember to bring with you:

- bottled drinking water
- food (perishable food should be kept cool in an esky or cooler bag)
- sunscreen
- a hat.

Returning to your property may be stressful and exhausting. It is important that you look after yourself. Specialist counselling and support services are available through your local government relief and recovery centre.

Handling waste

It is unsafe to spread or disturb ash around your property, particularly if CCA-treated timber was burnt. If materials containing asbestos in your home or other structures are damaged, they can now be harmful.

Food

All foods that have been fire-damaged or affected by heat should be thrown out. This includes all perishable and non-perishable foods, for example, cans or packaged foods. Power outages can leave perishable foods that may have been refrigerated unsafe to eat.

Water tanks

Bushfires generate large amounts of smoke and ash, and your tank water could have become contaminated from debris and ash or dead animals. If the water tastes, looks or smells unusual do not drink it or give it to animals.

Septic tanks

Your septic tank may have been weakened in the fire, so do not drive or walk over it. If you suspect your septic tank has been physically damaged, contact a licensed plumber to have it assessed.

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