



RETURNING HOME SAFELY AFTER A FIRE



Take precautions to stay safe and protect your health.

Information & Resources for Residents Impacted by the TCU September Lightning Complex



**For assistance call the Tuolumne Office of Emergency Services at: (209) 533-5151
For health or social services support information call: 2-1-1**



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- Before going back, always confirm with local officials that it is safe to re-enter your property.
- Before removing any ash or debris, please check county advisories on removal. Failing to abide local debris advisories could result in disqualification for any debris assistance.

The county works with various state and federal partners to establish a process for the assessment and removal of hazardous waste and asbestos, as well as structural ash and debris.

Lastly, as you reoccupy your homes, **continue to monitor your health and the health of your family.** Symptoms like coughing, eye irritation, or headaches could be linked to lingering contaminants. Individuals, such as children, the elderly, or those with respiratory conditions, should take extra precautions or avoid reentering the home until it has been cleaned.



SAFETY CHECKS WHEN YOU RETURN TO YOUR PROPERTY

- Examine your home for fire damage.
- Look for hot spots, smoldering areas, and vegetation on your property. Trees and brush weakened by fire may lose limbs and fall. Trees and poles with deep charring, especially if still smoking, should be considered hazardous. White ash is evidence of hot material.
- Inspect the roof, gutters, lawns, wood piles, decks, fences, and other outer parts of your house for any sparks or embers.
- Look for any damage or debris in driveways and areas outside your home and contact local officials for assistance to safely remove debris.
- Search the attic and all rooms for hidden sparks or embers.
- If there are electrical wires or utility poles down near your home, stay clear of them and contact your utility company immediately.
- If there is damage to gas lines, meter, or propane tank, do not try to repair them yourself. contact your gas company for guidance and assistance.
- Ensure your utility company has advised your power is safe to turn on.
- Check your water supply system, like wells or pump-houses, to make sure they are working.
- If you spot any danger, call 911 immediately.



Tuolumne County Office of Emergency Services Debris Removal Website
<https://www.tuolumnecounty.ca.gov/1389/Debris-Removal-Information>



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ASH CLEAN-UP IN AREAS WITHOUT FIRE DAMAGE

- Ash, soot, dust, and other airborne particles may have been deposited inside and outside of homes and businesses.
- Ash from wildfires can irritate, skin, eyes, nose, and throat. Ash in the air may trigger asthmatic attacks in people who already have asthma.
- Ash, dust, and debris (particularly from burned buildings) may contain toxic and cancer-causing chemicals, including asbestos, arsenic, and lead.
- Do not let children play in or with items covered by the ash.
- To avoid skin contact, **wear household dishwashing gloves, long-sleeved shirt and long pants during clean up.** If ash does get on your skin, wash off with warm water and soap as soon as possible.
- Wear safety goggles (not safety glasses) if clean-up may cause ash in the air and if using chemical cleaning solutions, to prevent splashing into the eyes.
- Wear safety shoes or sturdy close-toed, high-ankle leather shoes if burn debris (i.e., broken glass, metal, wood, etc.) is in the area that is being cleaned.
- If handling broken material (i.e., glass, metals, wood, etc.) wear gloves that protect against cuts, abrasions and punctures (i.e., leather or Kevlar gloves).
- A disposable N-95 mask or better can be worn during clean-up to avoid breathing in ash and other airborne particles. However, they do not protect from gases. They can be purchased from a home/hardware store. **N-95 masks must be properly fitted**, with no gaps around the edges. An improperly fitted mask is the same as wearing no mask at all. *Note: follow mask label instructions. N-95 masks may make it harder to breathe, especially for those with lung or heart disease. People who must be outside for extended periods of time in an ash-covered may benefit from using a tight-fitting N-95 respirator or greater to reduce their exposure.*
- Try not to get ash into the air. **Do not use leaf blowers** or other actions that will put ash into the air. **Gentle sweeping** of indoor and outdoor surfaces, **followed by wet mopping or damp wet cloth**, is the best way to clean an area with ash. A solution of bleach and water may be used to disinfect an area, if desired. Read label on container for proper use.
- **Shop vacuums and regular household vacuum cleaners are not recommended to clean up ash.** These vacuums do not filter out small particles, but blow particles into the air where they can be breathed in. HEPA-filter vacuums can filter out small particles and can be used.
- Ash may be thrown away in the regular trash by placing it in a plastic trash bag first; this will prevent the ash from becoming airborne and blowing away as the trash can is emptied.
- Shower regularly throughout the day when cleaning in and out of areas with ash.



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FOOD SAFETY AFTER A FIRE:

The safety of food may be a problem if the power outage lasted for a long period of time. If you experience a power outage or find that your kitchen has ash, soot, dust, and other airborne particles, **avoid foodborne illness by following these recommendations:**

- Any food or drink products with an off odor or signs of spoilage should be thrown away. Best practice is: *"When in doubt, throw it out."*
- Generally, food in the refrigerator is safe if the power was out for no more than **4 hours and** the refrigerator and freezer doors were kept closed. Keeping the doors to the refrigerator and freezer closed helps maintain the coldest temperatures.
- **If a power outage lasts more than four hours** or the refrigerator door was not kept shut, it is best to **throw away perishable food items** such as meat, dairy products and eggs.
- Items that have thawed in the freezer should be thrown away. Do not re-freeze thawed food.
- Plastic bottles with liquid (ex: water), that has been covered in ash should be thrown away. It is not enough to rinse off the bottle as these particles contaminate the caps, making them very difficult to decontaminate.
- Food that has not been stored in waterproof or airtight containers and has been covered with ash should be thrown away. This includes products that have been stored in cardboard or other soft packaging.
- Food stored in sealed, previously unopened glass or metal cans or jars, such as baby food, should be safe for use. Clean before opening and transfer the contents to another container before eating.
- Throw food away in trash bags and seal tightly before placing in the trash can. Double bagging is recommended.



WATER SAFETY AFTER A FIRE:

- Unsafe Water Notices (*Boil Water, Do Not Drink, Do Not Use, and Do Not Drink/Do Not Boil*) may be in place due to fire response efforts. Regularly check local advisories that may impact your area and contact your public water system company if you have one.
- Visually inspect your well and plumbing for damage to components and contact local environmental health or well inspectors for testing options. Expect changes in color or odor of well water after a fire. Well water may be unsafe to consume and the property owner should get the water evaluated.
- Customers in the affected areas are advised to use bottled water.
- When Unsafe Water Notices are canceled and normal water service returns, flush the hot and cold water lines until the water appears clear.



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