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Riverside County
News Advisory

County EOC PIO
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Health officials warn Riverside County residents of dangers of ash

Riverside County health officials are urging residents to take precautions as they clean up the ash that has fallen on their cars, homes and driveways as a result of the Holy Fire.

“Just because it’s burned up doesn’t make it safe,” said Dr. Cameron Kaiser, Riverside County public health office. “Ash can be toxic even in small quantities depending on where it came from.”

Officials said residents should not begin the clean-up while ash is still falling and the situation is unpredictable. Wait until conditions improve.

Avoid skin contact with ash. Ash from burned homes and other items will likely contain potentially toxic materials if breathed in or touched with wet skin, such as metals, chemicals, and potentially asbestos. If you do get ash on your skin, wash it off immediately. Some wet ash can cause chemical burns.

Inhaled ash may be irritating to the nose, throat and lungs. In order to avoid possible health problems, the following steps are recommended:

- Avoid activities that stir up ash.
- Do not allow children to play in ash or be in an area where ash-covered materials are being disturbed.
- Wash ash off toys before children play with them.
- Clean ash off pets.
- Clean-up of larger quantities of ash should never be done by people who have lung or heart conditions.
- If you must clean up a larger quantity of ash, wear a tight-fitting respirator mask (such as an N95 or P100 mask found at hardware stores), gloves, long-sleeved shirts and long pants. The mask should cover your mouth and nose and seal properly.
- Avoid sweeping up dry ash into the air.
- Use water and wet cloth or mop to clean items and surfaces.
- Sweep gently with a push broom, then hose lightly with water. Take care to conserve water. Ash can be bagged and put into trash cans.
- Wet (or moisten) ash lightly with water (hose or spray bottle), then gently sweep with a push broom. A shop vacuum equipped with a high-efficiency particulate filter (HEPA) and a disposable filter bag can also be used to pull up moistened ash.
- Do not use leaf blowers, which can stir up ash and can contribute to large particles becoming smaller, more hazardous particles.

Larger ash particles can cause irritation to the eyes, nose and throat. Over time, ash particles break down into smaller, more harmful particles that can lodge deep into our lungs, causing serious health effects, including aggravated asthma, bronchitis, and lung damage. The particles are also small enough to get into our bloodstream and have other toxic effects.

If you have symptoms that may be related to exposure to smoke or soot, consult your doctor. Symptoms include repeated coughing, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, wheezing, chest tightness or pain, palpitations, headaches and nausea or unusual fatigue or lightheadedness.