



Department of
Toxic Substances
Control

*Preventing
environmental
damage from
hazardous waste,
and restoring
contaminated
sites for all
Californians.*



State of California



California
Environmental
Protection Agency

Emergency Guidance on Wildfires #1

Handling Ash, Debris and other Hazardous Materials from Burned Structures

Ash, charred debris, and other contaminated materials from burned structures may be hazardous wastes. To minimize exposure to emergency personnel, the general public, and workers involved with restoration efforts, and minimize dispersion to the air and run-off to surrounding surface waters, the ash and contaminated debris should be cleaned up and contained as quickly as possible. Actions taken to immediately mitigate and contain and control hazardous waste releases are exempt from hazardous waste permit requirements [22 CCR 66270.1(c)(3)(A)] after the Governor has declared the county in a State of Emergency. This document provides general guidance for the management of these materials. This guidance applies only to the emergency actions taken to clean up, contain and dispose of the ash and debris from the burned structures. This guidance does not apply to long-term restoration activities.

During emergency cleanup efforts, restoration workers must evaluate readily identifiable hazardous wastes and determine if they can be safely segregated and managed separately from the ash and debris. If hazardous material cannot be separated safely, it is permissible to contain and dispose of these materials with the ash and contaminated debris.

Uncontaminated and unburned hazardous materials (i.e., hazardous materials with smoke damage from partially burned structures) should not be commingled with ash and debris. These materials should be segregated and directed to local hazardous waste collection programs. See DTSC emergency response guidance on the collection of hazardous wastes from burned areas.

Ash and Debris from Residential and Commercial Structures

Ash and contaminated debris from residential structures should be contained and disposed of at a municipal solid waste landfill (class three) under the direction of the local solid waste enforcement agency. If feasible, disposal to a lined landfill is environmentally preferable.

Ash and contaminated debris from commercial structures must also be contained and disposed of as quickly as possible to minimize exposure. In addition, it is more likely that hazardous materials and hazardous wastes will be found and need to be segregated from the ash and contaminated debris at commercial structures. Generally, ash and contaminated debris from these structures may be handled in the same manner as ash from residential structures.

Industrial-Type Business Structures

Ash and contaminated debris from these structures should be cleaned up and contained as quickly as possible. Debris from this type of business is more likely to contain hazardous waste residues not typically found in the municipal solid waste stream; and therefore, disposal to a municipal solid waste landfill (class three) may not be appropriate for these materials. Your local certified hazardous materials program and/or DTSC should be contacted if assistance is needed with ash, debris or site evaluation from such premises prior to containment.

Segregated Wastes

Segregated hazardous wastes should be transferred to local household hazardous waste collection programs as soon as feasible. Most businesses affected by the fires will have lost all records that can be used to establish monthly generation rates. Therefore, unless the business was obviously not a small quantity commercial source, DTSC recommends that local household hazardous waste collection programs accept hazardous wastes from affected commercial sources to facilitate the safe removal of the hazardous materials.

Examples of Segregated Wastes

The following materials should be separated to ensure safe handling and disposal of ash and debris:

- Compressed gas cylinders and propane cylinders
- Gasoline cans (and other fuel containers)
- Bulk chemicals and chemical containers
- Lead acid batteries
- Transformers
- Paints and thinners
- Bulk pesticides
- Bulk fertilizers
- Munitions
- Laboratory equipment
- Electrical transformers
- Air conditioners
- Large metal appliances, lawn mowers, tractors, chainsaws, etc.
- Automobiles and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs)

This guidance is general in nature; specific situations may require additional considerations. If specific questions arise, please contact the DTSC Regulatory Assistance Officer at (800) 72T-OXIC or RAO@dtsc.ca.gov.