



Deschutes County Wildfire Re-Entry Guidance

(Properties with Fire Damage)

General Safety Considerations

Ash and debris from burned houses, sheds and other structures can be hazardous, particularly when particles are inhaled. Ash and partially burned debris may contain asbestos, mercury, lead, cadmium, chromium and a variety of other dangerous chemicals.

- **Be aware of all electrical hazards**, including those from downed power lines or other electrical sources, as well as hazards from unstable walking surfaces and sharp objects buried in the ash. Use extreme caution at all times when near fire debris.
- **Be aware of hazard trees**, including those that show sign of weakness by having burning/burnt cavities anywhere along the trunk, snags, or those that are leaning. You should consider having an arborist evaluate your property for trees that may be at risk of falling.
- **Wear sturdy footwear, eye goggles, a properly fitted N95 respirator and heavy-duty work gloves.** If possible, wear disposable coveralls and dispose of them after use. If you do not wear disposable coveralls, change into a clean set of clothes after working or rummaging in debris and ashes.
- **Cloth face coverings, paper masks and bandanas are not effective** at filtering out fine airborne ash, dust or asbestos fibers. N95 respirators, if [properly worn](#), can offer protection from airborne particles.
- **Don't use a leaf blower to clean up ash.** It will create more airborne particles. Ash must be adequately wetted down to control dust that can become airborne. Water may not always be available, but it is one of the most important means to control ash and asbestos. When cleaning with water, please ensure water containing ash is not washed into the stormwater system or into surface waters. Water containing ash can cause water quality issues.
- **Children should not be involved in cleanup activities.** Do not let children near the debris or in an area where they might breathe airborne particles left from the fire.
- **Wash any recovered personal items** with water or wipe with a damp cloth to remove potentially toxic dust. Ensure water containing ash is not washed down any kitchen/bathroom/utility sinks or into surface waters. Water containing ash can cause water quality issues.



Steps for cleaning up ash and fire debris:

- **Contact your insurance provider** before you begin cleanup to learn of requirements they may have for reimbursement.
- **Disposing of and handling burned vehicles:** Be sure to check with your vehicle insurance provider before disposing of any burned vehicle. You may have to apply with Oregon DMV for a lost title. Visit [DMV's Wildfire Recovery page](#) for more information.
- **Contact Deschutes County Community Development** to determine their cleanup requirements and for new construction permits – 541-388-6574.
- **Determine if the ash and debris contain asbestos.** Many homes and buildings have materials with asbestos. Oregon has strict rules on how asbestos must be handled. You can hire an [accredited inspector](#) to survey your property for asbestos-containing materials, or you can presume that all debris and ash contain asbestos. DEQ strongly recommends hiring a [licensed abatement contractor](#) to perform any abatement activities. Asbestos is a known carcinogen and there is no known safe level of exposure. Find more information about asbestos requirements on [DEQ's asbestos webpage](#), or contact DEQ prior to starting any ash or debris cleanup activities.
- **Contact your local waste disposal site** to learn what requirements they have for waste acceptance. Many landfills require specific documentation of the waste you drop off so they can handle it properly and comply with regulations. This can include lab results to determine what hazardous materials are in your debris. If you do not have the proper documentation, you may not be allowed to dispose of your debris.
- **Cover ash and debris loads during transport.** Additionally, asbestos containing waste materials must be packaged properly for transport and disposal. This means double bagging the material in 6 mil plastic sheeting and labeling it as asbestos.
- **Recycle metal, concrete and wood debris.** Clean recyclable materials with water prior to transport to reduce the spread of asbestos or other contaminants in the ash. Do not discharge water containing ash into the stormwater system or surface waters, as it can cause water quality issues.
- **Protect waterways while you clean up your property**
- **Learn what to do about your septic system.** Septic tanks and system components can be damaged by fire and create safety hazards. For local support in Deschutes County you can email onsite@deschutes.org or call 541-388-6519.



Contact DEQ for help if you:

- Have concerns about [asbestos](#) on your property, or if you find evidence of asbestos fibers and want to know more about how to ensure safe disposal.
- **Household Hazardous Waste**
Do not throw away bleaches, cleaners, paints, or oils in regular trash. Contact **Deschutes County Solid Waste (541-317-3163)** or **DEQ** for safe disposal guidance.
- Need assistance with the inspection or replacement of [septic systems](#).

DEQ Bend Office (serving Crook, Deschutes, Harney, Hood River, Jefferson, Klamath, Lake, Sherman, and Wasco counties)

- Asbestos: 541-633-2019 or 866-863-6668
- Solid Waste: 541-298-7255, Ext. 225

DEQ strongly urges property owners not to 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, 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.

Additional Guidance: <https://www.oregon.gov/deq/wildfires/Pages/After-the-Fire-safety.aspx>

Wells after a Fire

Private wells and water systems: If you had loss of pressure, physical damage, and/or structure loss, consider testing. See attached OHA Post Wildfire VOC Sampling Guidance.

Oregon Water Resources Department guidance:

https://www.oregon.gov/owrd/WRDPublications1/Drought_and_Wells_Fire_Related_Final.pdf

Oregon Health Authority guidance “How to Assess Damage to a Private Well After a Fire”:

<https://sharedsystems.dhsoha.state.or.us/DHSForms/Served/le3558a.pdf>