



# News Release

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## **Cleanup of Wildfire Debris Can be Hazardous to Your Health SRHD & Spokane Clean Air Recommend Taking Precautions Beforehand**

SPOKANE, Wash – Spokane Regional Health District (SRHD) and Spokane Regional Clean Air Agency (Spokane Clean Air) recommend taking precautions before and during cleanup of debris left over from wildfires and have provided recovery resources and guidance.

Fires leave ashes, charred wood, melted plastics, damaged metals, burned appliances, roofing material, dead and dying trees and landscaping plants, cracked foundations and other debris. Information is available to help property owners and contractors plan the proper handling and disposal of remaining debris to keep themselves, their family and their community environment safe as well as stay in compliance with local and state environmental regulations.

This debris can contaminate soil, nearby wells, lakes and streams. Not only could the handling of toxic debris cause health issues, property owners are responsible for how contractors handle and dispose of the waste debris from their properties.

“It’s very important that people recognize the dangers of handling hazardous materials, which are toxic to their health and to the environment.” Said Mike LaScuola, SRHD environmental health specialist. “There are steps you can take to protect yourself while disposing of the debris correctly.”

SRHD has put together a [comprehensive list of resources](#) to help guide the community through the process of cleanup and recovery. This list will be updated and added to as the community moves through recovery stages:

- Checking your home after a fire
- Handling and disposal of debris and ash
- Disposal of burned structures
- Wildland fire chemical cleanup
- Disposal of household chemicals
- Safety of propane and heating oil tanks
- Food safety
- Adequate protective clothing and masks
- Private wells and septic systems
- Mental health resources
- How to help or donate

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One of the chemicals that concern public health officials is asbestos. Fire will not destroy asbestos, and precautions should be taken when handling fire debris or items contaminated with it after the fire is out.

According to Spokane Clean Air's Lisa Woodard, communications and outreach manager, when building materials that contain asbestos are damaged or disturbed, asbestos fibers become airborne and can be inhaled.

"There is no known safe level of asbestos exposure," said Woodard.

According to SRHD Health Officer Dr. Francisco Velázquez, when inhaled, asbestos fibers can become lodged in the lungs and remain there throughout life. Fibers can accumulate and cause scarring and inflammation and lead to serious conditions including lung cancer and mesothelioma.

"Asbestos fibers, once airborne, can be inhaled into the lungs, and even a small amount of asbestos exposure could increase the risk of serious disease developing later in life," explained Velázquez. "We recommend having property debris sampled by a certified professional prior to cleanup."

Information about asbestos, cleanup requirements, and guidance for protecting yourself in areas where asbestos may be present, such as building debris and ash left behind from a fire, are available at [spokanecleanair.org](http://spokanecleanair.org).

[Spokane County Emergency Management](http://Spokane County Emergency Management) has the Disaster Assistance Center, open today 12-6 p.m., located at Spokane Falls Community College Building 9, 3305 W. Whistalks Way in Spokane. The center has state and local agencies present to offer services and information for those impacted by the Gray and Oregon Road fires.

#### **About Spokane Regional Health District**

Spokane Regional Health District is a leader and partner in public health by protecting, improving and promoting the health and well-being of all people through evidence-based practices. SRHD is one of 34 local public health agencies serving Washington state's 39 counties. Visit [www.srhd.org](http://www.srhd.org) for comprehensive, updated information about SRHD and its triumphs in making Spokane a safer and healthier community. Like SRHD on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/srhd) or follow us on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/srhd) to receive safety and wellness tips.

#### **About Spokane Clean Air**

Our job is to ensure that people in Spokane County have clean air to breathe. We monitor air quality for key pollutants to know how clean the air is and where to focus our resources. We implement programs to improve air quality; we enforce federal, state, and local air quality laws; and we encourage individuals to make clean air choices.

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