

Bushfires—staying safe during clean up

Protecting you and your family’s health must be a key priority following a bushfire. Houses, sheds and other buildings or structures burnt in a bushfire can leave potential health hazards in the remaining rubble, ash and debris. These hazards may include:

- hazardous household materials (e.g. asbestos), ash from treated timbers (e.g. copper, chromium, arsenate or CCA), medicines, and garden or farm chemicals
- hot, smouldering coals and ash, electrical hazards (e.g. live power lines that may be down), gas cylinders (e.g. LPG), other dangerous items hidden under the debris
- buildings and other structures (e.g. septic tanks) that may be unstable to walk over or enter.

How to stay safe

Before starting any cleanup work in a fire-damaged building, check with your local emergency services or council to make sure it is safe to enter the building. If it is safe to enter, protect yourself by:

Wearing appropriate clothing and equipment, such as:

- sturdy footwear and heavy-duty work gloves to protect yourself from burns and sharp objects
- protective overalls with long sleeves and trousers
- special masks—called P1 or P2—to filter out fine particles, including asbestos fibres. These are available at most hardware stores.

Handling burnt materials and waste debris appropriately:

- dispose of building waste and debris in a safe manner in allocated disposal sites. Disposing of hazardous materials onsite or in nearby gullies may contaminate surrounding land
- take care when handling materials from buildings built before 1990 as they may contain asbestos. These materials are generally not a risk to health unless they are significantly disturbed. If asbestos is likely to be present on your property, a licensed asbestos removalist should be engaged to do the cleanup work. For more information visit www.health.qld.gov.au/disaster
- don’t spread ash around the property, especially if asbestos materials or CCA-treated timber was burnt during the bushfire. Keep children and pets away from ash until the cleanup is completed. Ash from burnt CCA-treated timber contains up to 10 per cent (by weight) arsenic, copper and chromium, which may be harmful if ingested by young children or pets

- minimise airborne ash by keeping the waste debris wet, do not use high pressure water sprays for this purpose
- throw away foods that have been fire damaged or heat affected, along with any perishable foods that have been left unrefrigerated. For more information visit www.health.qld.gov.au/foodsafety.

While cleaning up outside, make sure you wear sunscreen and a hat, and drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration.



What to do if your home smells of smoke

You can decrease the smell of smoke inside your home by:

- opening up your windows to allow sunlight and fresh air into your home
- washing all hard surfaces and cooking utensils with household detergent and water
- airing all soft furnishings outside—including mattresses and curtains—and re-washing any smoke-affected clothing and linen.



Further information:

- Queensland Health
www.health.qld.gov.au/disaster
- Queensland Fire and Rescue Service
www.fire.qld.gov.au
- National Centre for Farmers Health—publications
www.farmerhealth.org.au/topic-page/bushfires/bushfire-aftermath-hazards
- Workplace Health and Safety Queensland
www.deir.qld.gov.au/workplace/index.htm
- Contact your nearest Queensland Health public health unit.

Queensland Health public health units:

Brisbane North	Tel: 3624 1111	Darling Downs	Tel: 4631 9888	Mount Isa and Gulf	Tel: 4744 9100
Brisbane South	Tel: 3000 9148	Gold Coast	Tel: 5668 3700	South West	Tel: 4656 8100
Bundaberg	Tel: 4150 2780	Hervey Bay	Tel: 4184 1800	Sunshine Coast	Tel: 5409 6600
Cairns	Tel: 4226 5555	Logan	Tel: 3412 2989	Townsville	Tel: 4753 9000
Central Queensland	Tel: 4920 6989	Mackay	Tel: 4911 0400	West Moreton	Tel: 3413 1200
Central West	Tel: 4652 6000	Moreton Bay	Tel: 3142 1800		