



OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH & SAFETY
333 S. Beaudry Avenue, 21st Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90017
Phone: (213) 241-3199
Fax: (213) 241-6816



SAFETY ALERT

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RESPONDING TO WILDFIRE ASH IN SCHOOLS

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As a result of wildfires, many schools have asked how to handle ash and other particulate matter that has accumulated in classrooms and on school campuses. According to the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, ash from wildfires is relatively non-toxic and similar to that found in home fireplaces; however, it may be irritating to the skin, nose and throat. Sensitive individuals may experience more severe health effects. As such, do not allow children to play in or around ash. Limit outdoor activities and strenuous indoor exercise while ash is present or during unhealthy air quality days.

During a Fire Event

- Take action to minimize ash accumulation indoors.
- Keep classroom doors and windows closed as much as possible.
- Turn “on” the Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) system, which will filter much of the particulates. Set systems to recirculate mode, if possible.
- Keep walkways and building entrances free of ash to reduce the amount of debris tracked into buildings. Place doormats at building entrances to reduce material from being tracked in.
- Avoid intense physical activity outside.
- Reduce smoke in vehicles by keeping windows and vents closed and turning on the air conditioning to “recirculate.”

Protecting Workers from Unhealthy Air

- A NIOSH approved N-95 or KN95 filtering face piece respirator may be worn to avoid breathing in ash and other airborne particles.
- Avoid any actions that would make the ash airborne such as using a leaf blower.
- Wear disposable/single use gloves, long sleeved shirts and long pants to avoid skin contact.
- When the air quality index (AQI) for fine particles is forecasted to be or currently is greater than 150, work activities shall be moved inside enclosed buildings with working HVAC.
- If this is not feasible, the work may be relocated to other areas where the AQI is lower, the work intensity may be reduced, or additional rest periods may be provided. For workers remaining outdoors, N95 respirators shall be provided for voluntary use.

Caution during Ash Clean-up

- Gentle sweeping of indoor and outdoor surfaces, followed by wet mopping is recommended.
- Building exteriors and outdoor areas may be cleaned with a water hose and spray nozzle using as little water as possible. Avoid washing ash into storm drains whenever possible.
- Heavy ash residue may be swept into piles, placed in plastic bags and disposed of in the regular

trash. Bagging will help to minimize the generation of dust as the material dries and is emptied from the refuse bin.

- Remove indoor residual ash with a damp cloth by wiping down horizontal surfaces and walls.
- Use of shop vacuums and household vacuums is not advised unless they contain High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filters because they can blow small particles into the air. Similarly, yard sweepers and vacuums are also not recommended.
- Wash toys and other soiled items before allowing children to play with them.
- Discard food that has not been stored in waterproof or airtight containers. This includes products that have been stored in cardboard or other soft packaging.
- Clean food containers before opening and transfer the contents to another container before eating.

Weather conditions can cause ash to fall for an extended period of time even after the wildfire is extinguished. Daily inspections should be made to determine if additional cleaning is necessary.

Schools and offices can monitor the Air Quality Index (AQI) using the District's [Know Your Air Network](#), or refer to the [South Coast Air Quality Management's \(SCAQMD\) website](#) for live data. The [AirVisual App](#) can also be used and set up to provide alerts when air quality reaches "Unhealthy" levels, (AQI > 150).

You may contact the Office of Environmental Health and Safety if you have any questions at (213) 241-3199 or OEHSQuestions@lausd.net.

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