



ORDER OF THE SAN MATEO COUNTY HEALTH OFFICER PROHIBITING THE UNSAFE REMOVAL, TRANSPORT AND DISPOSAL OF FIRE DEBRIS AND OTHER HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

Under the authority of California Health and Safety Code sections 101040 and 101085, the San Mateo County Health Officer orders as follows:

WHEREAS, on September 9, 2020, the San Mateo County Health Officer declared a local health emergency due to the hazardous conditions created by fires at various locations in the southern portion of San Mateo County which appear to have been caused by lightning strikes related to atypical weather patterns (referred to herein as the “CZU August Lightning Complex Fires”); and

WHEREAS, on September 15, 2020, the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors ratified the declaration of a local health emergency due to the conditions of extreme peril caused by the CZU August Lightning Complex Fires; and

WHEREAS, the potential for widespread toxic exposures and threats to public health and the environment exist in the aftermath of a major wildfire disaster, and debris and ash from residential structure fires contain hazardous substances and the health effects of hazardous substances releases after a wildfire are well-documented; and

WHEREAS, exposure to hazardous substances may lead to acute and chronic health effects and may cause long-term public health and environmental impacts, and uncontrolled hazardous materials and debris pose significant threats to public health through inhalation of dust particles and contamination of drinking water supplies; and

WHEREAS, improper handling of hazardous materials and debris can expose workers to toxic materials, and improper transport and disposal of fire debris can spread hazardous substances throughout the community; and

WHEREAS, the CZU August Lightning Complex Fires have created hazardous waste conditions in San Mateo County in the form of contaminated debris from household hazardous waste/materials and structural debris resulting from the damage and/or destruction of a large number of structures; and





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WHEREAS, this hazardous waste debris poses a substantial present or potential hazard to human health and the environment unless its removal and disposal is performed in a manner that will protect the public health and safety; and

WHEREAS, the scope and breadth of the CZU August Lightning Complex Fires create an imminent threat to public health, and the presence of hazardous waste and materials will require safe removal of these items from the sites of burned structures; and

WHEREAS, Health and Safety Code section 101040 authorizes the Health Officer to require protective measures in the context of a local emergency.

NOW, THEREFORE, the San Mateo County Health Officer **ORDERS** as follows:

- a. Property owners, tenants and members of the public shall not enter the burn footprint of structures without Personal Protective Equipment. Personal Protective Equipment shall be in accordance with the guidelines set forth in the document “Protecting Public Health from Fire Ash,” attached hereto as Exhibit A.
- b. Unless or until additional orders are issued to address the CZU August Lightning Complex Fires emergency clean up, no cleanup activities of burned structures shall commence without the written authorization of the Director of the Environmental Health Services Division of San Mateo County Health, or her designee.
- c. Unless or until additional orders are issued to address the CZU August Lightning Complex Fires emergency clean up, no debris bins shall be provided to property owners for the purposes of the removal of fire debris without the written authorization of Director of the Environmental Health Services Division of San Mateo County Health, or her designee.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

Scott Morrow MD, MPH
Health Officer of the County of San Mateo

September 15, 2020
Date



EXHIBIT A

Protecting Public Health From Fire Ash

All persons accessing burned structures should be aware of the potential hazards associated with those sites. Cleanup efforts at these sites may expose you to ash, soot, and fire decomposition products that can cause health effects including, but not limited to, eye/skin/respiratory irritation. If possible, try to **AVOID** direct contact with ash. If you get ash on your skin, in your eyes, or in your mouth, wash it off as soon as you can, with clean water.

Ash from burned structures is generally more hazardous than forest ash. Ash from burned structures contains microscopic particles (dust, dirt, soot) that can be deposited on indoor and outdoor surfaces and can also be inhaled if the ash becomes airborne. Unless tested, the ash is not classified as a hazardous waste. However, it may contain traces of hazardous chemicals, such as metals (lead, cadmium, nickel and arsenic), asbestos (from older homes or other buildings), perfluorochemicals (from degradation of non-stick cookware), flame retardants, and caustic materials. For these reasons, you should be cautious and avoid any unnecessary exposure to the ash.

Health Effects of Ash: Ash may irritate the skin, nose, and throat, and may cause coughing and/or nose bleeds. Fine particles of ash can be inhaled deeply into lungs and may aggravate asthma and make it difficult to breathe. If the ash contains asbestos, nickel, arsenic or cadmium, then exposure is a particular concern because these substances can cause cancer. Because the substances in the ash vary, it is always best to be cautious.

High-Risk Persons: People with asthma or other lung diseases, pregnant women, and the elderly or very young should exercise special caution because they may be more susceptible to health effects from the ash.

Children: Do not allow children to play in ash. Wash and clean all children's toys carefully after possible contamination. Children should not be in the vicinity while cleanup is in progress. Even if care is exercised, it is easy to stir up ash that may contain hazardous substances. Because children are naturally curious, they may end up in direct contact with contaminated materials if not closely supervised.

Pets: Clean ash off house pets and other domesticated animals if they have been in contaminated areas. It is best to not allow pets in these areas due to the potential risk to their health and their ability to spread outside of contaminated areas.

Clothing: Covering clothing is recommended, when in proximity to ash. Wear gloves, long-sleeved shirts, and long pants to avoid skin contact, whenever possible. Goggles are recommended. Contact with wet ash may cause chemical burns or irritation on skin. Change your shoes and clothing prior to leaving the decontamination site, to avoid tracking ash into your car, residence, etc.

Masks: When exposure to dust or ash cannot be avoided, a well-fitted NIOSH-certified air-purifying respirator mask shall be worn. A mask rated N-95 or P-100 is much more effective than unrated dust- or surgical-masks in blocking ash particles. Although smaller sized masks may appear to fit a child's face, manufacturers do not recommend their use for children. If your child is in an area that warrants wearing a mask, you should remove them from that area to an environment with cleaner air. Persons with heart and respiratory problems should consult with their primary care physician prior to wearing a mask to clean up after a fire.