

Wildfire Recovery

Personal Safety

Wildfires in Texas can spread quickly, damaging lives and property. But even after fires are put out, people should take care to avoid injuries as they return home to begin the recovery process. DSHS urges people to be aware of the following hazards:

- **Ash:** Adults should use a protective respirator mask (N-95 or P-100) while cleaning up areas in which ash particles cannot be controlled. Ash and dust from burned buildings may contain toxic and cancer causing chemicals including asbestos, arsenic and lead. Children should not be in the area while cleanup is in progress.
- **Electricity:** Avoid downed or damaged electrical lines. Electrical repairs should be done by a qualified technician.
- **Carbon Monoxide:** Place generators, power washers and other fuel burning devices at least 50 feet away from the house and away from open doors and windows to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning.
- **Natural Gas:** Do not enter an area or building where you smell gas. Do not turn on the lights or light a match. Leave the area immediately, then call 9-1-1.
- **Propane:** If a home propane tank is damaged and leaking, call 9-1-1 and the propane service provider. Do not transport leaking propane tanks in a car or dispose of them in the trash.
- **Food:** Discard food that may have spoiled, thawed or come into contact with hazardous materials like fire retardant or ash. Loss of power to refrigeration and freezer units can cause food to spoil. If you're not certain food is safe, throw it out.
- **Water:** Check with the water provider to be sure that water is safe to drink because water pressure may have been lost during the fire.

Water from a damaged water system or well may require disinfection by boiling for one minute or stirring in 1/8 teaspoon of unscented bleach per gallon and letting sit for 30 minutes.

- **Debris:** Get a tetanus shot if you have not had a booster in 10 years or can't remember when your last shot was, and be careful. Broken glass, exposed wires, nails, wood, metal, plastic and other debris can cause puncture wounds, cuts and burns. Falling trees and tree limbs while using chain saws can cause severe injuries.

Mental Health

Mental health is also a concern as people deal with the traumatic events that surround a fire. Common feelings after a wildfire include fear, sadness and guilt. People can have trouble sleeping or feel jumpy, irritable, or numb. These symptoms are normal, and there are things people can do to cope with traumatic events:

- Take breaks from cleanup efforts and don't overdo it. Get rest, drink plenty of water, and accept help from others.
- Return to as many personal and family routines as possible, and find ways to relax and do something that you and your family have enjoyed in the past.
- Exercise, but do so indoors if the air quality isn't acceptable.
- Talk about your experiences and feelings with family, friends or clergy, and keep a journal.
- Upsetting times can cause some people to use alcohol or drugs to cope with stress. In the long run, that will not help and may lead to other problems.

For mental health assistance or additional information, dial 2-1-1.

For online information, go to www.dshs.state.tx.us or www.TexasPrepares.org.