

Bushfire Recovery

Managing Chemical Hazards

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Fires often expose chemicals and other hazards that can be a risk to livestock and other animals. With fencing damaged or destroyed, it is important to identify these hazards and prevent wandering animals, where practicable, from entering these areas. While personal safety is key for landholders in the recovery phase, risks to animals also needs to be managed.

Before beginning the clean-up process, prevent animals from accessing damaged buildings, machinery areas and other hazardous sites. This may be as simple as some ring-lock or netting and a few star pickets.

The first step is to identify hazards. Some of the hazards that may be present following a fire include

- Houses damaged or destroyed by fire can contain lead paint or asbestos
- Garden plants that are toxic to animals
- Sheds used to store garden or farm chemicals such as fuel, pesticides, fertilisers, animal medicines or pool chemicals
- Farm rubbish sites can contain old car batteries, paint and other hazards
- Structures or stockpiles of treated timber, or ash from these, may contain copper chrome arsenate (CCA) which is very toxic to humans and animals. This can be found in old sleepers, power poles, vineyard posts, fence posts and palings, and buildings
- Livestock dips and jetting sites

Keeping your pets and livestock safe from chemical hazards

Stock and pets on fire affected properties may be at risk from chemical hazards such as

- Lead from old paint and batteries
- Organophosphates found in pesticides, stock dips and old tip sites
- Asbestos from old buildings. Structures built before 1988 may contain asbestos

This can be present in wall sheeting, roofs, floor underlays, chimney flues or vinyl floor tiles and the back of linoleum. These materials are generally not a health risk unless they are cut, broken, drilled, crushed or burnt, which releases asbestos fibres into the air. Clean-up work following a fire will disturb these fibres.

- Copper chrome arsenate (CCA) from treated wood sources commonly used in structures such as landscaping, orchard or winery trellising, formwork, wooded power poles and fence posts
Ash from [CCA treated timber](https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au) (<https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au>) is toxic and may contain more than 10 percent of its weight as heavy metal residue, including arsenic. Swallowing only a few grams of this can be harmful. Children, pets and other animals must be kept away from these ash areas until clean-up is completed
- General household chemicals, medications and chemical residues from burnt furniture or appliances

Managing chemical hazards after fire

Recovery after bushfire may be stressful and exhausting. Residents and those assisting in the clean-up of fire-affected properties are encouraged to take care when removing and disposing hazardous material. Make sure you wear adequate protective clothing, gloves and shoes before handling any debris, ash or other waste. Refer to [NSW Government advice](https://www.emergency.nsw.gov.au) (<https://www.emergency.nsw.gov.au>) on clean-up assistance, waste disposal and personal safety. Note specific advice applies to removal of asbestos (see links below).

Do not enter your property until you are advised by the relevant authority that it is safe to do so. If an authorised hazard identification notice is displayed on the property, note the dangers identified and seek advice on management from your local council or NSW EPA.

While personal safety is key for landholders in the clean-up phase, risks to animals also need to be managed. A number of practical measures can be taken to ensure animal safety during the recovery phase:

- Install temporary fencing to keep animals out of hazardous areas. Simple solutions could include ring-lock or netting between star pickets or an electric fence powered by solar energizer.
- Excluding stock access to ash and burnt timbers from chemically treated (CCA) timber stockpiles should be undertaken where practicable. Seek advice from NSW EPA on clearing this material on 131 555. Further information is provided [here](https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au) (<https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au>).
- Flammable or toxic materials, such as gas bottles, petrol, drums/bottles of chemical or poison should be separated from other debris. Seek advice from your local council or NSW EPA on safely disposing of these items. While some may be taken to local

recycling centres, chemicals and poisons need to be disposed of through chemical clean-out events. For more information visit: <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au>.

- If chemicals are leaking, seek specialist advice from your local council or NSW EPA on 131 555.
- If you have a septic tank or system, be aware that it may have been weakened in the fire so do not drive or walk over it. Damaged septic systems may cause human, stock and pets health risks.

Further information provided by the [Office of Emergency Management \(https://www.emergency.nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.emergency.nsw.gov.au) includes:

- Ash should not be spread around your property, particularly if asbestos materials were used in your home or other structures, or if CCA-treated timber is burnt.
- Wetting down ash and debris with water will help to limit airborne dust before you start cleaning up. Do not use high pressure water sprays.
- Building rubble should not be buried as it may contain hazardous material.

Information on assistance after bushfire

A range of assistance measures are available to support people affected by bushfires. Further information is provided [here](#).

<https://www.emergency.nsw.gov.au/Documents/Bushfire%20Recovery%20Assistance%20Information.pdf>

Further information on clearing fire damaged material

For information about the safe handling and removal of asbestos, visit www.safework.nsw.gov.au

For information about the health risks associated with asbestos, visit www.health.nsw.gov.au

For information about common areas where asbestos can be found in the home, visit www.asbestosawareness.com.au

For information on waste and clean-up following bushfire, visit www.emergency.nsw.gov.au

For information on returning home safely after bushfire, visit www.health.nsw.gov.au

For information and factsheets for residents impacted by bushfire, visit <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/news/news/2020/bushfire-information>

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