

# Cleaning up after a bushfire

In the aftermath of a bushfire, there are a range of hazards and risks that should be considered and managed. These include reduced visibility due to smoke, falling trees and branches, and a range of hazards associated with burnt or fire affected homes and structures.

Houses, sheds, appliances, and other buildings or structures that are burnt in a bushfire can leave potential health hazards in the remaining rubble and ash. Before going back to your property to clean up or retrieve personal items, be aware of the potential risks.

If you are insured, contact your insurance company before you start any cleaning or repairs, as they may assist you.

If you are uninsured, visit a Relief Centre where staff and volunteers can help organise ongoing support and clean up through not-for-profit partners.

Reach out to your State-Government appointed Local Recovery Coordinator if you need advice or assistance.

## Your mental health

Returning to your property may be stressful and exhausting. It is important that you look after yourself and access mental health and counselling services if required. For more information and support visit our [Disaster and Mental Health support](#) page.

## Personal protection and child safety

Make sure you wear adequate protective clothing, (including long sleeves, trousers, gloves and sturdy shoes) before entering your property.

When possible, avoid taking children onto fire damaged properties. If this is unavoidable, ensure they are adequately supervised and remain protected at all times.

Watch out for falling limbs from fire damaged and heat stressed trees.

## Rain water

The presence of ash and debris in rainwater does not represent a health risk. It could affect colour, turbidity and taste. Similarly, fire retardants should not present a risk to health. For more information, see the [Bushfires and rainwater quality](#) page on our website.

## Wastewater management systems

Your on-site wastewater management system (for example, septic tank, aerated wastewater treatment system) may have been weakened or destroyed in the fire, so avoid driving or walking over or near it.

The on-site wastewater system should be inspected for bushfire damage by a licensed plumber or service technician. Arrangements should be made for repair of the system as soon as possible. Reduce water use as much as possible until the system is inspected and repaired.

## Asbestos

During a bushfire, the amount of asbestos fibres released into the air is likely to be low. After a bushfire, asbestos fibres can be disturbed by clean-up work. If you suspect your property may contain asbestos, the debris must be disposed of safely and securely. Contractors must only enter the site in full personal protective equipment and all debris must be securely bagged and transported in a sealed tray.

Not all landfills are equipped to accept and dispose of debris that contains asbestos. Visit [www.asbestos.sa.gov.au](http://www.asbestos.sa.gov.au) for advice and information on managing asbestos.

## Treated wood

CCA-treated wood is commonly used in structures such as pergolas, decking, fencing and landscaping. After a fire, the ash from this wood contains up to 10 per cent (by weight) arsenic, copper and chromium. 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.

[The Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)](#) provides advice on disposal of burnt CCA treated timber.

## Animal carcasses

There are a range of options for on-farm disposal of animal carcasses. Contact the [Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)](#) for advice.

## Farm and other chemicals

Hazardous material that may be present after a fire includes: medicines, garden/farm chemicals, and other general chemicals such as cleaning products, liquid paints or pool chlorine.

Visit the [Green Industries](#) website for more information on drop off centre opening hours and accepted items.

---

## For more information:

Visit: [sahealth.sa.gov.au/afterabushfire](http://sahealth.sa.gov.au/afterabushfire)

## Contact:

The Recovery Hotline: 1800 302 787

SA Health: (08) 8226 7100

Your local council



Public-A1 – I1

© Department for Health and Wellbeing, Government of South Australia.  
All rights reserved. FIS: 20007.5 Jan 2020.



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses>



Government  
of South Australia

SA Health