



Chelan-Douglas Health District

200 Valley Mall Parkway, East Wenatchee, WA 98802

7/14/26

Dear Property Owner,

You are receiving this letter because your property was impacted by the Chelan Hills wildfire. The Chelan-Douglas Health District extends its sincere sympathy for the loss of your home and recognizes the challenges you face during the recovery and rebuilding process. This letter, along with the enclosed information, is intended to provide guidance on important environmental health requirements and resources to assist you as you rebuild.

Building Ash and Fire Debris

As outlined in the enclosed Waste Management guidance, ash and partially burned building debris must be transported directly to the Greater Wenatchee Regional Landfill by an approved contractor.

Due to elevated concentrations of heavy metals and other contaminants, this material **cannot** be disposed of at the Chelan Transfer Station or buried on your property. Improper disposal may result in contamination of groundwater, including private drinking water wells on your property or neighboring properties.

Private Wells and Drinking Water

Wildfires can damage wells, pump houses, pressure tanks, and water service lines. After any necessary repairs have been completed, the water system should be thoroughly flushed before use. The Chelan-Douglas Health District recommends testing your well for coliform bacteria before occupying your rebuilt home. Water sampling kits and instructions are available from:

- Eurofins (formally Cascade Analytical), 3014 Ohme Rd, Wenatchee (509) 490-4828
- Anatek Laboratories, 3019 GS Center Rd, Wenatchee (509) 701-8362

Additional information about wells and wildfire are included with this mailing.

Septic Systems and Reconnecting to Your New Home

Septic systems within the Chelan Hills fire area vary from conventional gravity systems to advanced pressure distribution systems. Many systems contain plastic or fiberglass components located at or above ground level that may have been damaged by the fire. Electrical control panels serving pressure systems were often destroyed and will require replacement. General information regarding septic systems and wildfire recovery is enclosed.

Phone: (509) 886-6400 | Fax: (509) 886-6478 | www.cdhd.wa.gov

Always Working for a Safer and Healthier Community

To reconnect an existing septic system to your rebuilt home, please follow the steps below.

1. Obtain Your Septic System Records. Request copies of all available septic system records from the Chelan-Douglas Health District at: <https://www.cdhd.wa.gov/public-records-request>
Please request all septic system-related documents, including:

- Design documents
- Permit
- Cover inspection
- As-built (record drawing)

2. If Your Septic System Was Never Permitted. In some cases, the Health District may not have records of an existing septic system. If no records are available, you will need to apply for a **Repair Permit**. This process requires the services of a licensed septic system designer or professional engineer. The designer will evaluate the site by excavating approximately 6-foot-deep test pits to determine soil conditions and identify an appropriate septic system design. Existing septic tanks may be reused if they meet current Washington State requirements. A list of licensed designers is available at: <https://www.cdhd.wa.gov/service-providers-licensed-designers>

3. If Your Septic System Was Previously Permitted. If records exist for your septic system, you will first need to obtain an Operations and Maintenance (O&M) Inspection from a licensed O&M service provider. A list of qualified providers is available at the website listed above. The inspection will identify any repairs necessary to restore the system to proper operating condition. Minor repairs—such as replacing electrical control panels, tank riser lids, or inspection ports—do **not** require a permit.

To reconnect your permitted septic system to your rebuilt home, complete the following steps:

- a. Obtain an O&M Inspection Report from a licensed service provider.
- b. Submit the following documents:
 - O&M Inspection Report
 - Floor plan of the new home
 - Scaled site plan used for your Douglas County building permit

The site plan must show:

- Proposed home location
- Well location and 100-foot sanitary protection radius
- Driveway
- Septic tank(s)
- Drainfield(s)
- Other relevant site features

c. Apply for a **Connect to Existing Septic System Permit** through the Chelan-Douglas Health District SmartGov permitting system: <https://www.cdhd.wa.gov/smartgov> Upload the required documents noted above for Health District review as part of your application.

4. Health District Review. Once your application and supporting documents have been reviewed and approved, the Chelan-Douglas Health District will release its portion of your building permit review.

5. Final Approval. If a new septic system is installed or repairs are required following the O&M inspection, the Health District will require documentation from your licensed service provider confirming that all required work has been completed before final building occupancy approval can be issued for your rebuilt home.

If you have questions about your septic system, drinking water, or other environmental health requirements during the rebuilding process, please contact the Chelan-Douglas Health District. We are committed to helping you navigate these requirements and supporting your recovery following the Chelan Hills wildfire.

Sincerely,



Brian Dickey, R.S.
Environmental Health Specialist III
(509) 886-6418 brian.dickey@cdhd.wa.gov

Enclosures: Waste Management – 2026 fire debris disposal information
Septic system after the fire guidance document
NEHA – wildfire and your well



Greater Wenatchee Regional Landfill and Recycling Center
Residential Fire Debris Disposal Information
May 20, 2026

Waste Management's Greater Wenatchee Regional Landfill and Recycling Center (GWRLRC) strongly recommends that residents whose properties were affected by fires hire a licensed contractor to perform fire debris cleanup and removal activities for the protection of human health and the environment. All debris customers must receive a disposal permit from Waste Management Builders Direct prior to bringing these wastes to the landfill. Please call **1-800-963-4050** or e-mail Builders Direct at pbuilder@wm.com prior to starting the clean-up process.

Fire debris can contain many types of hazardous materials, including the following:

- Tiny particles of dust, dirt, and soot that can easily become airborne and inhaled;
- Toxic amounts of heavy metals including arsenic, cadmium, copper, lead and mercury;
- Asbestos and asbestos-containing materials (ACM), in both friable and non-friable states;
- Material such as propane tanks, air conditioners, batteries, cleaning products, pesticides, and herbicides that are hazardous or require special handling and disposal.

Due to the potentially hazardous nature of fire debris, cleanup and rehabilitation activities can pose both acute and chronic health hazards including respiratory/lung diseases, cancer, mesothelioma, and asbestosis if proper precautions are not taken.

Site Preparation Considerations

Cleanup of fire impacted properties should be conducted by professionals who have the appropriate expertise and equipment for these activities. The area should be cleared of all fire and potential for fire recurrence and should be safe from unstable structures, hazardous materials, falling vegetation, open pipes, burning gas, propane tanks and other hazards. Appropriate personal protective equipment including N-95 masks, gloves, long shirts and pants, safety glasses and safety boots/shoes are recommended. Appropriate procedures should be followed when leaving such an area, including changing shoes and removing outer layers of clothing. Ash and soils must be wetted to eliminate emissions to the surrounding area to the greatest extent possible.

Remediation of property destroyed or damaged by fire can be dangerous and should be approached with caution. The area should be deemed safe by state and local authorities prior to remediation and clean-up activities. **No fire debris should be transported for disposal unless it has been fully extinguished with no hot spots or risk of reignition and has received a permit to dispose from the WM Builders Direct Program.**

Fire Debris Segregation and Handling

The following activities should be considered as part of the remediation and cleanup process:

- Conduct a hazardous waste and asbestos assessment completed by certified professionals.
- Identify site-specific hazards (unstable structures and/or vegetation) and remove hazards before proceeding.



Certified professionals should identify obvious hazardous materials, including asbestos containing materials, radioactive materials, mercury, bullets and mortar rounds, and other explosive materials. Such materials will need to be removed and handled by the appropriate professionals and disposed of in accordance with applicable laws. Be aware of the fact that as additional debris is uncovered, hazardous material may be present that could not be previously identified. If uncertain, do not attempt to handle potentially hazardous items without professional guidance.

Non-hazardous fire debris must be wetted and secured (i.e., covered) during transportation and disposal to prevent dust emissions.

Fire Debris Disposal

Fire Debris from Residential Properties - WM Builders Direct

All customers with fire debris removed from residential properties must contact WM Builders Direct prior to arrival at GWRLRC for a permit to dispose fire debris and technical support on complying with transport and disposal requirements. Residential fire debris customers are required to submit documentation of hazardous waste clearance and an asbestos survey to Builders Direct for review and approval. These clearance documents must be from a certified and licensed contractor, or a State or local government office. WM Builders Direct technical staff will work with customers to ensure all required documentation is obtained and will provide customers with a permit to dispose and information on the required packaging and handling requirements needed for disposal. **All loads taken to GWRLRC must be accompanied by an approved Builders Direct Permit.** Failure to contact Builders Direct will result in significant delays and may result in rejection of the load(s). GWRLRC **cannot** accept wastes identified through the waste screening process as being hazardous.

Structural fire debris without an asbestos survey may be accepted as assumed asbestos, subject to proper packaging and documentation, as described below.

Contact WM Builders Direct here: 1-800-963-4050

Email: pbuilder@wm.com

Special Waste Considerations

Asbestos Containing Materials

Assessment of all properties with structural fire debris must be completed by a certified asbestos contractor. The contractor will inspect and prepare documentation that the property contains or does not contain asbestos-containing materials (including ash). The EPA, Department of Ecology, and Department of Health strongly encourage homeowners to employ a certified asbestos abatement contractor to remove any waste containing regulated asbestos. Homeowners that elect to remove asbestos-containing materials from their own property must adhere to state and federal regulations for asbestos project notification, handling, packaging, and documentation.

Please review the following Homeowner's Guide to Asbestos Cleanup after Disasters for more information: https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/IEPWG_ASBESTOS_FAMILY.PDF



Notification

In Douglas County, the Department of Ecology Central Region Office must be notified of asbestos cleanup projects prior to commencing the work (10-day notice is typically required). The Central Region Office can be contacted at 509-575-2490.

Handling

Homeowners are strongly encouraged to seek the assistance of a certified asbestos abatement contractor when cleaning up asbestos debris. At a minimum, use the following procedures to handle suspected asbestos-containing material.

- Always wear personal protective equipment (PPE) when handling asbestos. PPE includes gloves, goggles, Tyvek[®] or equivalent clothing and respiratory protection. Asbestos fibers are impossible to see so a fitted rubber half-face respirator (mask) with cartridges rated for use with asbestos (HEPA, N100) is the minimum protection. *These masks are not effective in the presence of facial hair.*
- Wet down suspected asbestos surfaces and keep wet at all times.
- Avoid activities that will generate dust, and do not crush, grind, or damage materials. Do not sweep or vacuum in areas where asbestos-containing materials are located.
- Wash hands after handling asbestos but before removing the mask.
- Keep all family members out of the work area or seal the area. Do not carry contaminated clothing or other materials home to your family members. Dispose of contaminated clothing with the other asbestos-containing materials (required packaging information described below).
- Avoid smoking, eating, or drinking in asbestos-contaminated areas.
- Post signs: **Danger: Asbestos Dust Hazard; Cancer and Lung Disease Hazard; Authorized Personnel Only**
- Shower or hose off to keep from bringing asbestos into your current living quarters.

Packaging – Supplies are available for purchase at the landfill

Asbestos-containing materials are required to be packaged as follows pursuant to state and federal regulations:

- Asbestos-containing materials must be kept wetted at all times during handling and packaging.
- Gently place wetted asbestos materials in minimum 6 millimeter thickness plastic bags. Asbestos-containing materials must be double-bagged, sealed and labeled.
- Avoid activities that will generate dust, and do not crush, grind, or damage materials. Do not sweep or vacuum in areas where asbestos-containing materials are located.
- Dispose of contaminated clothing and PPE with the other asbestos-containing material in double bagged, 6 millimeter plastic bags.
- Once full, bags must be securely sealed with tape and labeled. Ensure that bags do not rupture, tear, or leak. Do not overfill bags.
- Bags must be labeled using a permanent marker or printed label with the following information:
 - Generator Name
 - Address
 - Date of removal
 - The following Asbestos Warning Label:

Danger
Contains Asbestos Fibers
May Cause Cancer
Causes Damage to Lungs
Do Not Breathe Dust
Avoid Creating Dust



Transportation and Disposal

All loads with fire debris material must be transported in a covered vehicle. Asbestos-containing material may NOT be transported in uncovered vehicles or trailers. Loads of asbestos containing material must be accompanied by both an Asbestos Waste Shipment Record (attached to this document) and a Builders Direct permit for acceptance at GWRLRC. Customers must provide these documents to the scalehouse attendant along with a form of identification at GWRLRC prior to disposal. The scalehouse attendant will direct customers to the proper location for disposal. Asbestos-containing material must be carefully unloaded at the landfill to ensure that bags do not tear or rupture during disposal.

Deceased Animals and Livestock

GWRLRC is authorized to accept deceased animals and livestock.

General Household Items (not fire debris from structures)

General household items (not structure debris) that are damaged by fire (e.g., furniture, clothing) may be disposed of in accordance with general household waste guidelines. These materials should be separated from other structural materials. Segregated loads of fire-impacted household goods and/or municipal solid waste (MSW) that do not contain hazardous materials may be disposed at GWRLRC without a Builders Direct permit.

Vehicles and Metal

GWRLRC **cannot** accept discarded or abandoned vehicles but may be able to accept damaged vehicles (with appropriate documentation) that a recycling facility does not accept. Please contact our WM Solutions team at www.wmsolutions.com or 800-963-4776 to address protocol elements, including the following:

- Identify any vehicles (i.e., cars, boats, motorcycles, ATV's, trailers, etc.) and other large metal debris that need to be removed for recycling and disposal.
- Confirm that motor vehicles have been cleared of their titles.
- Verify that any liquid in the vehicle is removed prior to transport for recycling or disposal.

Non-Refrigerant Containing Appliances

GWRLRC **does not** accept refrigerant-containing appliances even if refrigerant has been removed by a licensed professional. Non-refrigerant containing appliances are accepted for disposal at GWRLRC. All contents of the appliance need to be removed prior to disposal.

Medications and Medical Waste

GWRLRC is authorized to accept **treated** medical waste that has been rendered non-infectious. Please contact WM Solutions for information regarding medical waste and medication disposal at 800-963-4776.

Concrete and Asphalt Recycling

Concrete and asphalt may be recycled at GWRLRC **if** segregated from other waste. Such materials will be disposed as waste at GWRLRC if they are not sorted.



Additional Information:

FEMA has posted advice on Salvaging Damaged Family Treasures and can be downloaded at
https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1452020463438-03d4365a46c620bdd1ad1e854379c237/Fire_FIMA_Fact_Sheet_2015_508.pdf.

Chelan Douglas Health Fire Debris Cleanup Response and Regulations

<https://www.cdhd.wa.gov/after-a-wild-fire#docaccess-ef5b62ba1fe290b1fec6edf38687931f49bea291617862485b9cf9e2c45a143e>

Safety is a core value at Waste Management. At GWRLRC, our safety value includes safety training and safety protocols to protect our employees, customers, the community and the environment. Our commitment to safety includes the safe management of fire debris.



Greater Wenatchee Regional Landfill and Recycling Center
Fire Debris Disposal Fact Sheet • November 30, 2020

- ▶ Fire debris may be dangerous and contain hazardous materials, heavy metals, asbestos, etc.
- ▶ Fire damaged properties should be surveyed by a licensed professional for both hazardous waste and asbestos prior to debris cleanup, transport or disposal activities.
- ▶ Fire debris may require special packaging and handling, including thoroughly wetting and covering loads, to prevent emissions of ash or other environmental impacts
- ▶ Customers with structural fire debris **MUST** contact Builders Direct prior to arrival at GWRLRC to obtain an approved disposal permit.
 - **Phone Number: 1-800-963-4050**
 - **Email: pbuilder@wm.com**
- ▶ GWRLRC does NOT accept hazardous waste.
- ▶ GWRLRC is authorized to accept non-hazardous municipal solid waste, construction and demolition debris, asbestos containing materials, dead animals and livestock, inert waste, damaged/non-recyclable vehicles, and treated medical waste, subject to all applicable rules and regulations.
- ▶ Non-hazardous structural fire debris may be accepted without an asbestos clearance as assumed asbestos, which requires the material to be properly packaged and documented prior to disposal at GWRLRC.



Waste Shipment Record

1. Work Site Name and Mailing Address

Worksite Name and Address:
Owner's Name:
Owner's Mailing Address:
County:

2. Operator's Name and Address (if different from Owner)

Name:
Address:
Phone Number:

3. Disposal Site Name: Greater Wenatchee Regional Landfill and Recycling Center

Mailing Address: 191 Webb Road, East Wenatchee, WA 98802
Site Address: 191 Webb Road, East Wenatchee, WA 98802
Phone Number: 509-884-2802

4. Name and Address of Responsible Agency

US EPA Region 10
1200 6th Ave
Seattle, WA 98101

Ecology - Central Region Office
1250 Alder St
Union Gap, WA 98903

5. Description of Materials:

6. Containers

Type: Bags / Drums / Burrito Wrap / Other:
Quantity:

7. Total Quantity in Cubic Yards:

8. Special Handling Instructions and Additional Information

Asbestos-containing material must be packaged correctly and adequately wetted at the time of disposal

9. Operator's Certification: I hereby certify that the above listed material(s) is (are) not hazardous waste as defined by 40 CFR Part 261 or any applicable state law. I hereby declare that the contents of this consignment are full and accurately described above by proper shipping name and are classified, packaged, marked, and labeled and are in all respects in proper condition for transport by highway according to applicable regulations.

Printed Name and Title:
Signature:

Address:
Date:

10. Transporter 1 (Acknowledgement of receipt of materials)

Printed Name and Title:
Signature:

Address:
Phone Number:

11. Transporter 2 (Acknowledgement of receipt of materials)

Printed Name and Title:
Signature:

Address:
Phone Number:

12. Discrepancy Indication Space

13. Disposal Site Owner/Operator: Certification of receipt of asbestos material covered by this manifest except as noted in Item 12

Printed Name and Title:
Signature:
Date:

Wildfires

Private Wells and Natural Disasters

Prepare, Respond, And Recover

Safety Reminders

After a wildfire, private wells can be contaminated and unsafe to use for drinking water and other purposes. Well components and pipelines may be damaged due to excessive heat. These components can melt or become damaged, affecting water delivery and potentially impacting water quality. To be prepared, understand your well type, know its location, and familiarize yourself with critical well components.



These tips can help you respond effectively and facilitate a smoother recovery.

- Get help from a licensed well contractor. Contact your local health department, department of environmental quality or natural resources, or a university extension service to obtain a list of contractors in your area.
- Use bottled water or a stored water source to brush your teeth, drink, cook, and bathe until you know your water is safe to use.
- Have your well water tested at a certified water testing laboratory after a wildfire.
- Make sure you turn off power to the well pump before inspecting the area around your well due to the danger of electrical shock and damage to your drinking water system.
- Be careful walking in an area affected by wildfire. There may be exposed wires, metal edges, nails or screws, and damaged hazardous material containers.

Fire-prone Areas

Always keep your well maintained; a maintained private well is better able to withstand the stresses of a wildfire. Take these steps to protect your private well:

- Know and document all components of your well. Take photos of the connections and system components. These photos will be helpful if components need to be replaced or to file insurance claims. Make sure to include:
 - Storage or pressure tanks
 - Pump
 - Treatment system (include any filters)
 - Electrical components
- Store all well documents in an easily accessible location.
- Store possible contaminant sources away from your well. This may include chemicals, fertilizer, and flammable materials such as paint, gasoline, solvents, or paper (often used as insulation).
- Use a well house made of fire-resistant materials, such as a concrete. A fire may destroy or damage a wood, plastic, or metal well house, increasing the risk of contamination.
- Use fire-resistant electrical coverings. A wildfire will melt or burn standard electrical wire coverings, leaving bare or melted wires.
- Keep the sanitary seal and well cap in good condition. A metal sanitary seal may offer some heat resistance. A fire will likely destroy the well cap or damage the seals.
- Keep extra sanitary seals and well caps in case they become damaged.
- Install shut-off valves right before and after the pressure tank to prevent contaminated water from entering the tank. This also creates a spot to shut off the water line before any water storage or treatment devices.
- Install backflow prevention valves on all hydrants and outside taps.
- Use a non-PVC well casing if constructing a new well. PVC casings may melt during a fire, which can lead to expensive repairs or drilling a new well. Contact your local health department, university extension, or a licensed well contractor for casing recommendations.

Before a Wildfire

Essential Steps to Take

- Buy or store safe water, such as bottled water, to use for drinking, cooking, bathing, and flushing toilets for three days.
- Have contact information for a licensed well contractor, your local health department, university extension service, and water testing laboratory.
- Clear debris near the wellhead.
- Remove the well house (if possible) if it is made of an easily burned material, such as wood, vinyl, or plastic.
- Turn off power to your well pump and unplug all equipment (if possible) to reduce the risk of electrical shock or electrical overloading. The power switch may be by the water pump or tank or at the main electrical panel.
- Shut off the water using shut-off valves.



Steps to Take if Time Allows

- Wrap the well cap and well casing with durable flame-retardant sheet plastic and duct tape to form as tight a seal as possible.
- Place fire-resistant sandbags around the well to protect the well from fire, heat, and flame retardants used to control the wildfire. If possible, cover the wellhead with a sealed stand pipe and bury it with fire-resistant sand bags.
- Cover the well pit (if applicable) with flame-resistant sheeting and sandbags.
- Remove any aboveground well pumps or piping and store them in a fire-resistant area.

During a Wildfire

- Follow emergency and evacuation advice for your area.
- Use a safe source of water, such as bottled water, for drinking, cooking, and bathing.
- Be careful if using your well water for fire suppression. Turn off the water if air or debris is coming through the hose. The groundwater may need time to recharge. Pulling mud through the system may damage the pressure tank or other water treatment devices.

After a Wildfire

Step 1: Inspect and Repair

A wildfire will leave warning signs that your private well may be unsafe. Inspect your well and contact a licensed well contractor if you see the following signs of damage. Make sure the power to the well is off before your inspection. Check the following for damage:

- Electrical wires and connectors that supply power to your private well. Damaged electrical wires are dangerous; never touch damaged electrical wires under any circumstance. Contact a qualified electrician to repair any damaged components.
- Well cap, seals, and vents (vents should be unplugged).
- Plastic PVC casing, liner, and any aboveground piping used to bring water to your home.
- Well houses and equipment (such as chlorinators, water treatment equipment, and electronic controls).
- Indoor piping, storage and pressure tanks, and overflow pipes.
- Gaps around the outside of the well casing. The grout may have been damaged or the casing may have large cracks.
- Debris entering uncovered wells or storage tanks.
- Evidence of spilled chemicals or gasoline, such as from displaced containers.

Step 2: Clean and Flush Well

Use the following checklist to clean and flush your well before testing your water to determine if disinfection is needed.

- ☐ Check that power to the well pump is off at the breaker box.



- ☐ Temporarily cap the well if the well cap or casing are damaged. Use a sanitary seal or wrap a sheet of 6-millimeter plastic tightly around the wellhead and secure tightly with two zip ties. Contact a LWC for permanent repairs.
- ☐ Remove debris around the outside of the wellhead.
- ☐ Turn off the water going to the rest of the system if there is a shut-off valve and faucet before or after the pressure tank.
- ☐ Turn the pump on if there are no issues.
- ☐ If the pump will not start, turn off the electricity and contact a licensed well contractor.
- ☐ Flush the well by running the pump until the water runs clear. Use an outside faucet and a hose to direct the water away from the septic system, public sewer, nearby surface water, or animal habitats. Pumping times vary, depending on the groundwater recharge to the well, several flushes may be necessary.
- ☐ If the water does not run clear after several hours, contact a licensed well contractor and continue using bottled or stored water. Do not pump water from another source into your well: doing so may damage your pump and contaminate the aquifer.
- ☐ Disconnect or bypass household water filters or softeners if there is not a shut-off valve before or after the pressure tank. This will prevent those treatment systems from contamination.
- ☐ Check the water pressure using an outside faucet with one of the methods listed below. If the pressure is low, it may be recovered when the pump is turned on or there may be a pipe that burst. Contact a licensed well contractor if either issue occurs.
 - Turn on a faucet. If you hear air escaping from the faucet with water intermittently spurting out, you may have lost pressure.
 - Check your pressure gauge to see if your system is holding pressure. If you are losing pressure, your pump may come on when you are not using water.

Step 3: Test Well Water

You should test your well water for coliform bacteria, nitrate, and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) before use to make sure it is safe. Contact your local health department to ask about other contaminants of concern in your area. Testing your water will also reveal if you need to disinfect your water system.

- Get a water sample kit. Recovery teams may be distributing water-sampling kits. If not, call your local health department, a certified water testing laboratory, or university extension service.
- Follow the instructions on the sampling kit to avoid accidental cross-contamination and inaccurate results. Return the sample to the lab as soon as possible.
- Drink, cook, and bathe with bottled water or a stored water source until the results from the lab confirm that water is safe to use and all necessary repairs are completed.
- Retest the water to confirm the results are below [EPA's maximum contaminant levels \(MCLs\)](#). Contact your local health department for the best timeframe to retest.
- Consult with the manufacturer or a licensed water treatment installer if the filter or softener has been exposed to contaminated water.



Step 4: Disinfect Well

If your water is contaminated or repairs were performed, you may need to have the well professionally disinfected, especially if ammonia is present. Retest the water before use and be sure parameters are below [EPA's maximum contaminant levels \(MCLs\)](#).

Prepare for Flooding

Areas burned by wildfire have little to no vegetation; this increases the chances of flooding and mudslides, especially if the area undergoes a heavy rain event. This also increases the chance of infiltration by contaminants.

Acknowledgements

The Private Water Network is supported through the OT18-1802 Cooperative Agreement between the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), United States (US) Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

Private Wells and Natural Disasters: Prepare, Respond, and Recover is a series of factsheets intended to be a tool for environmental public health professionals who specialize in private wells, and as a resource for private well owners, developed in collaboration with members from NEHA's Private Water and Decentralized Wastewater Program Committee and the Private Water Network.

For additional tools and resources please visit: neha.org/water-quality.

References

- <http://www.watersystemscouncil.org/free-water-well-resources/>
- <http://www.brhd.org/documents/emergency-plans/414-wells-after-flood-1/file.html>
- <http://www.azdhs.gov/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/environmental-toxicology/well-water/index.php#emergencies>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/environmental-health-services/php/water/private-wells-after-a-wildfire.html>
- <https://www.doh.wa.gov/portals/1/Documents/Pubs/337-147.pdf>
- <http://extensionpublications.unl.edu/assets/pdf/g1494.pdf>
- <http://extension.colostate.edu/docs/pubs/natres/06706.pdf>
- <http://www.co.amador.ca.us/home/showdocument?id=21195>
- https://www.sccgov.org/sites/cpd/programs/disaster/Documents/WP_Well_Tips_After_Fire.pdf
- <http://extension.colostate.edu/docs/pubs/fire/septicssystem.pdf>
- https://static.azdeq.gov/wqd/wells_wildfires.pdf



GUIDANCE FOR SEPTIC SYSTEMS BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER A FIRE

STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO PROTECT YOUR HEALTH AND SEPTIC SYSTEM

Safety Reminders

- Get help from a septic system service professional for steps with this symbol .
- Steps with a  only apply to pressure distribution systems.
- Get help from a septic system service professional if any of the steps feel unsafe in your situation or your system loses power.
- Make sure power to the septic system is off before inspecting the area.
- Be careful walking near a damaged system.
- Wait to enter burned structures until they are cleared by a trained inspector.
- Wear gloves and eye protection when inspecting your septic system.
- Never enter the pump chamber or septic tank.

Before the Wildfire

Take these steps to reduce the effects of an impending wildfire on your septic system.

- Maintain your septic system.
- **Know your septic system and take pictures or keep documents of the following** to reference later if there is damage:
 - Septic tank location.
 - Septic system records or drawings.
 - Electrical components.

- **Mark system components with a fire-resistant marker such as a rock.**

- **Turn off electricity to the system** at the circuit breaker.

-  **Turn off your pump at the circuit box** if you have a pressure distribution or mound system.

- **Turn off electricity to the system** at the circuit breaker.

- **After the power is off, wrap control panels, plastic risers, and lids with a durable flame-resistant sheet plastic.**

- Follow defensible space guidelines (use the Cal Fire App or local guidance).

During the Wildfire

- **Follow emergency and evacuation advice** for your area.

- **Eliminate all non-essential water use** and flush toilets as little as possible if evacuation is not needed.

- **Try to find other toilets if your septic system is damaged.** If there are not toilets available, see the guidance on temporary toilets below.

After the Wildfire

Consult with a septic system service professional and follow the steps below.

- **Rope off your septic system.** The manhole and tank covers may be damaged and could cause falls.

-  **Stay out of the area if sewage backs up.** If the entire building is contaminated, abandon the building until all affected areas have been cleaned. A septic system service professional should be contacted to inspect and repair the system if it was flooded.

- **Reduce water use** until the system is inspected:

- **Avoid sending basement sump pump water into the septic system.**
- **Re-route water from roof gutters** away from the drain field area.

- **Take short showers**
- **Limit laundry and dishwashing**
- **Turn off the water** while brushing teeth, shaving, or rinsing dishes
- **Do not flush the toilet** each time it's used for liquid waste.

🔧 **If you have a pressure distribution system and your pump was not removed, a septic system service professional will need to inspect and repair the pump.** inspect and repair the system if it was flooded.

Professional System Inspection

Contact a septic system service professional for an inspection before using the septic system again.

An inspection may include the following:

- Open all parts of the system and see if debris entered the system. All sewage tanks should be pumped and cleaned out.
- Check for damage to above and below ground septic system components.
- Check for damage to piping where pipes enter the home.
- Make sure that inspection ports are free of blockage and damage. Replace and secure septic tank manhole covers as needed.
- Check the drain field and the area over the septic tank for depressions and damage from fallen debris. Repair with sod or seeding to provide good plant cover.
- Make sure wastewater moves between the parts of the system as intended.
- If your property was damaged, a month after the system is restarted, schedule a follow-up visit to check for proper operation.

🔧 OTHER SYSTEMS

If you have an advanced treatment unit or any other type of onsite wastewater treatment system not addressed above, contact a septic system service professional or your local health department.

Temporary Toilets

Only use a temporary toilet if there are no functioning toilets available and the wildfire is expected to last several days.

- **Check to see if you can stay somewhere else.**
- **Contract a PortaPotty for temporary use.**
- **Modify your own toilet:**
 - **Shut off the water valve** to the toilet. If you can't close it, try another option.
 - **Flush out any water still in the bowl.**
 - **Line your toilet bowl** (under the seat) with a plastic kitchen garbage bag inside of another kitchen bag.
 - **Into the inner bag, put some kitty litter, dry peat moss, lime, or something similar** that will absorb liquid.
 - **Do not mix urine and fecal material** if possible.
 - **After using the toilet, close the inner plastic bag** with a plastic tie or other method.
 - **Wash or sanitize your hands** after toilet use and waste handling.
 - **Store full bags in a secure area.** Consider a watertight bucket or trashcan.
 - **Dispose of the bags when possible.**
- **Use a five-gallon bucket as a toilet.** You can add a toilet seat and set it up like a modified toilet (above).
- **If you must dig a hole for your waste, make sure it's at least 200 feet** (70 adult steps) from water bodies and at least six inches deep. Fill it in after a single use, tamp the dirt down. This is a short-term option only and regulations may vary by jurisdiction.