

## Health Information

### Water contamination

If you have a water tank, be aware that the water is most likely to be contaminated either indirectly by ash, smoke, debris or directly by fire and the fire fighting activities. Do not use the water for drinking, preparing food, making ice, washing, bathing or cleaning teeth. Do not provide it to animals.

Please use the water instead to flush toilets, water the garden, wash cars and fight fires. It is dangerous to attempt to remove the contamination so we do not recommend this. Using any rainwater contaminated with ash or other debris to fill swimming pools or in evaporative air conditioners may clog filters and pumps. Contact the air conditioners, filter, or pump manufacturer for advice.

### Water testing

Water testing is usually not necessary as contamination after a bushfire is usually obvious. It is usually very difficult and expensive to remove effectively any contamination caused by fire suppressants or any other potentially harmful by-products caused by ash from burnt bush, plastics and metals.

To test the chemical quality of water in a water tank contact a National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA) accredited chemical laboratory <https://nata.com.au/nata/> .

Refer to the Department of Health Publication, Standard Drinking Water Assay

[https://www.health.wa.gov.au/Articles/S\\_T/Standard-drinking-water-test](https://www.health.wa.gov.au/Articles/S_T/Standard-drinking-water-test)

### Refilling a rainwater tank

The tank may need to be drained and refilled with water from a commercial water carting company. Before you do, make sure that:

- the tank or any associated pipework has not been damaged by fire
- the tank has been desludged and cleaned, if contaminated, by a specialist contractor.
- Do not reconnect your down pipes until your roof and gutters have been cleaned or rainwater from the first rains after the fire has been run to waste.

Make sure that the commercial carting company:

- uses the tanker exclusively for drinking water
- gets the water from a scheme drinking water supply
- has treated the water with at least 1 milligram per litre of chlorine while in transit
- follows the Department's water carting guidelines

[https://www.health.wa.gov.au/Articles/A\\_E/Drinking-water-carting](https://www.health.wa.gov.au/Articles/A_E/Drinking-water-carting)

### Other sources of water

Water drawn from deep bores or wells should be safe to use.



Do not obtain water from a creek or stream that has been affected by bushfire as the water may be contaminated.

### **First rains**

Ensure that all rainwater from the first good rainfall event after the fire is run to waste, as this may be contaminated by ash and other pollutants from the fire.

### **Further information:**

[Rainwater tank contamination \(healthywa.wa.gov.au\)](http://healthywa.wa.gov.au)

### **On-site wastewater systems**

On-site wastewater systems such as septic tanks, secondary treatment systems, aerated wastewater treatment systems and their land application systems (leach drains, sprinklers and below ground drippers and connection pipes), can be easily damaged during a bushfire.

Avoid driving or walking near a fire-affected system until it is assessed by a licensed plumber or service technician familiar with on-site wastewater systems.

Contact with effluent or untreated wastewater from damaged on-site wastewater systems can cause illness and should be avoided at all times.

### **Wastewater systems**

Plastic and fibreglass on-site wastewater systems, or systems made with plastic components, are more susceptible to damage than concrete tanks particularly if installed above ground. This includes shallow PVC pipes, plastic tanks and sumps, and plastic irrigation pipework which may be installed above or below ground. Pumps and other equipment with electrical components may also be damaged.

It is recommended that damaged on-site wastewater systems are not used until repaired or replaced.

Due to the risks associated with using systems after a bushfire, the following actions are recommended:

- If the on-site systems are damaged, make arrangements to repair the system as soon as possible to prevent sewage from backing up into the house.
- Avoid driving or walking near underground pipes, tanks and tank covers and their land application systems, which may have been weakened or damaged.
- Reduce water use as much as possible until the system is inspected and repaired by:
  - \* Reducing the frequency of toilet flushing for liquid waste
  - \* Taking shorter showers or shower elsewhere
  - \* Limiting laundry and dishwashing as much as possible. If possible avoid using automatic clothes washers and dishwashers.

- If the power has not been restored, the septic tank can be used as a temporary holding tank and pumped out periodically, provided the tank is not damaged. You may need to disconnect the pump (if present) and block the outlet to the land application area. If the tank is significantly damaged and can't be used as a temporary holding tank, do not use the system until it is repaired or replaced.
- Once power is restored, ponding may occur near the wastewater system and these areas should be avoided. Contact a licenced plumber or authorised service technician to reassess the system.
- Replace shallow PVC pipes if they have melted as they may cause blockages.
- Repair or replace damaged electrical components and pumps as soon as possible.

Residents should not use any toilets, laundry, kitchen, bathroom or clean-up equipment connected to the onsite wastewater disposal system until:

- \* all parts of the wastewater treatment and disposal system have been professionally inspected and repaired
- \* your onsite wastewater disposal system has been approved for use by the local authority environmental health officer.

Only trained specialists are suitably equipped to clean or repair onsite waste disposal systems. This is because tanks may contain dangerous gases and other harmful materials.

Onsite wastewater disposal systems should be pumped out by a licensed septic tank operator as soon as possible after the flood.

### **Further information**

- \* What should I do if my on-site wastewater system has been damaged by bushfire?

<https://health.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=bbc68d42eff51a06d25cb71db&id=61539341d3&e=e25ecdf60d>

### **Air quality from bushfire smoke**

Elderly, the very young, and people with respiratory and heart conditions need to take extra precautions to avoid exposure to bushfire smoke and smoke haze as it can worsen asthma and other respiratory conditions, cause coughing, shortness of breath, irritate eyes, nose and throat. People with a heart condition or lung problems, should make sure they always have at least five days' worth of medication if there is a bushfire nearby.

What should you do if I am exposed to bushfire smoke and smoke haze?

- Stay indoors and shut the doors (particularly if you have a heart and circulation conditions, asthma and other respiratory conditions)
- Reduce outdoor activity - limit outdoor exercise to reduce breathing in air pollutants

- Use air conditioners and filters – air conditioners that circulate indoor air. Switch off evaporative air conditioners and air conditioners that do not allow the fresh air intake to be turned off.
- Use a room air cleaner – A high powered portable air cleaner (with a high-efficiency particular air (HEPA) filter) may improve the air quality in a bedroom, which may be helpful to an individual with asthma. Room air cleaners will provide the most protection when placed in an enclosed room where people spend most of their time.
- Use respiratory protection – if you must venture outdoors wear a P1 or P2/N95 face mask that has a tight seal around the mouth and nose and can filter airborne contaminants.
- Keep hydrated - Drink plenty of water
- Look out for the elderly

Anyone with an urgent smoke-related health condition should seek medical attention by dialling 000. People with other medical conditions or who are feeling unwell due to the smoke impact are advised to contact their GP or health direct on 1800 022 222.

Once the bushfire is contained the smoke risk should decrease and no longer present a risk to the community.

For more information on smoke alerts visit **The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions** - [Bushfire alerts - Parks and Wildlife Service \(dpaw.wa.gov.au\)](https://www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/bushfire-alerts)

**For more information visit:**

Health hazards from bushfires - HealthyWA website <<https://health.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=bbc68d42eff51a06d25cb71db&id=eb27e71787&e=e25ecdf60d>>

What is bushfire smoke and how harmful is it (PDF 1.44MB) <<https://health.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=bbc68d42eff51a06d25cb71db&id=6a7b2c9811&e=e25ecdf60d>>

How to protect yourself and others from bushfire smoke (PDF 790KB)

<<https://health.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=bbc68d42eff51a06d25cb71db&id=207cfaa992&e=e25ecdf60d>>

How to monitor local conditions (PDF 410KB) <<https://health.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=bbc68d42eff51a06d25cb71db&id=cc025d64ec&e=e25ecdf60d>>.

### **Asbestos damage and contamination**

If your home or structure on your property was built before 1990, particularly between the 1970s and 80's, it should be suspected of containing asbestos, typically as flat or corrugated cement sheeting.

If you suspect or know your home or dwelling contains asbestos, please contact the Shire's Environmental Health team on 9290 6666

### **Chemicals and other hazards**

Houses, sheds, and other buildings or structures that are burnt in a bushfire can leave health hazards in the remaining rubble and ash including:

- Asbestos
- Ash from burnt treated timbers, such as copper chrome arsenate timber
- electrical hazards
- medicines
- garden or farm chemicals and pesticides
- other general chemicals, such as cleaning products or pool chlorine
- metals and other residues from burnt household appliances
- ash and dust.

### **More information**

After a bushfire hazard on your property, Healthy WA website

<https://health.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=bbc68d42eff51a06d25cb71db&id=75a3f4a661&e=e25ecdf60d>

Hazards on your property after a bush fire (PDF 58KB)

<https://health.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=bbc68d42eff51a06d25cb71db&id=6697fe8e18&e=e25ecdf60d>

### **Contaminated swimming pools**

After a bushfire a swimming pool may contain ash. This may affect the chemical balance of the water. Swimming pools should either be emptied or kept chlorinated to prevent the water quality from deteriorating.

You may need to make an assessment as to whether it is safe to empty the pool. Advice from a building consultant may also be required. If it safe to empty the pool, all water and residue should be removed. Where it is not safe to do so, a trained technical operator will need to inspect the pool.

### **For more information:**

\* Swimming pools and spas, HealthyWA website <https://health.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=bbc68d42eff51a06d25cb71db&id=b3990bba1f&e=e25ecdf60d>

\* Code of Practice for the design, construction, operation, management and maintenance of aquatic facilities January 2020 (PDF 1.1MB).

<https://health.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=bbc68d42eff51a06d25cb71db&id=ee9e97facb&e=e25ecdf60d>

## **Unsafe food that needs disposing**

### **Storage time**

Your food will remain safe in your refrigerator for 2 hours. If your freezer is efficient and its door seals are in good condition it can maintain foods in a frozen state for between 1 and 2 ½ days. If food has thawed out, throw it out

When disposing of food, wrap in newspaper and place in the rubbish bin. A small volume of food can be safely buried.

### **More information**

The power is off and so is your food, HealthyWA website

<http://www.healthywa.wa.gov.au/Safety-and-first-aid/Food-safety>

### **Dead animal control**

Landholders should search their property for dead animals as soon as possible after a disaster, provided it is safe to do so. In some cases, carcasses may have commercial value, so consider sending them to a rendering plant if possible.

If rendering is impractical, dispose of the dead animals on the premises. Where disposal or burial of any significant biomass, this must be undertaken in a consistent and appropriate manner in coordination with the local government.

### **Procedures to dispose of dead animals**

- Cover the animal with crude oil or kerosene to keep away dogs, scavenging birds and vermin.
- Well-fed pigs are the only animal carcasses that will burn satisfactorily. Old railway sleepers can be used as fuel. Burning of other carcasses is not recommended.
- Bury other carcasses. Use earth moving equipment if it is available.
- Choose a site where subsurface drainage will not reach water supplies.
- Bury the carcass at least 90cm to 120cm deep, so predatory animals won't be able to reach them.
- If quicklime (Builder's Lime) is available, cover the animal with it before backfilling. Quicklime speeds up the decomposition process.
- Work with the Shire's animal control officer for further guidelines.

Contact the Shire's Environmental Health Department before undertaking disposal or burial of any large animals, to be sure that is being done in the appropriate manner to avoid ongoing risks to water table and the environment.

For more information visit or contact the Department of Health

[Disaster Management \(health.wa.gov.au\)](http://health.wa.gov.au)