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PRESS RELEASE

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HOME CLEAN UP AFTER FIRE

Considerations for Cleaning Up the Interior of Your Home

(SANTA BARBARA, Calif.) -- If a home was impacted by the smoke and ash from the Thomas fire, here are some tips for safe cleanup of smoke, heat and ash. Those who clean should remember to wear an N-95 mask during clean-up to help protect their respiratory system.

Soot, Ash and Smoke

Soot and ash can cause minor irritation to eyes and skin and have harmful effects on individuals who are sensitive to debris or have respiratory illnesses or asthma.

- Encourage individuals with respiratory issues to avoid cleanup and breathing harmful air. Smoke from fire and wildfire can irritate eyes, skin, nose, throat and lungs. Smoke can cause coughing and wheezing and makes it difficult to breathe. Stay indoors and reduce physical activity if you are subject to asthma or heart disease. Wearing a “particulate respirator,” (N-95 mask) can help protect your lungs from smoke exposure.
- Clean up ash by windows and doors using a damp rag and dispose of these in the trash.
- When vacuuming use a vacuum with a HEPA (high efficiency particulate absorbing) filter and change the filter often.
- Change your furnace air filter to avoid spreading any soot or ash which may have accumulated in it. You may be able to purchase a HEPA furnace filter for your system.
- If you have an air purifier, turn it on. HEPA air purifiers and upgraded HEPA refill filters are available.

Smoke damage can be extensive in all areas of the home. It may damage computers and other electrical surfaces as well as textiles and other surfaces.

- Clothing/textiles. Follow cleaning instructions recommended by manufacturer. Washable textiles may benefit from adding 1 to 2 cups of vinegar to each wash load. Vinegar will help in removing odor and residue from smoke damage. Some materials may require multiple washings. Remember that water damage can cause mildew and off-odors following a fire, which may require additional enzyme cleaners to remove.
- Your computer and other electrical appliances could also be affected by smoke, heat or water. Check the owner’s manual before operating.

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Fire Retardant Concerns and Cleanup. Fire retardants, in the form of chemical gels, foams, and powder are effective tools that firefighters use in controlling fires. Wildfire retardants are usually ammonium phosphate marked with a colored dye. Following the fire, remove any retardant using a brush, water and detergent as quickly as possible. Use your N 95 mask. **Do not, under any circumstances, use chlorine (bleach) products to help with removal of retardants.** Chlorine combines with ammonia to form chlorine gas which is poisonous to humans and animals.

Checking Food that Has Been Exposed to Fire Damage

- Dispose of any fresh food that shows signs of damage from heat or fire, including ash or smoke. Any food displaying an off-odor or signs of spoilage should be thrown out. If food such as grains or flour is caked, doesn't flow freely, or is contaminated with ash, water, or chemicals, discard and replace.
- Excessive heat produced by fires can influence the safety of stored food. Toxic fumes from burning materials can contaminate food. Throw away food stored in permeable or semi-permeable packaging such as cardboard and plastic wrap. Also, home-canned food and food in screw-top jars may have been adversely affected by heat and toxic fumes and need to be thrown away. It is recommended that any home-canned food that has been exposed to the extreme heat of fire be discarded.
- If a wildfire caused evacuation from your home and power was not available to keep refrigerators and freezers running, check food immediately since it may have spoiled. Frozen food still containing ice crystals can safely be refrozen, but discard any refrigerated food if the refrigerator temperature reached 40 degrees F or higher.
- Place spoiled food in heavy trash bags and seal. Do not let bags come in contact with children or pets.

For more detailed information consult <http://celake.ucanr.edu/files/219268.pdf>
"Cleaning Up After a Fire Disaster"