

# SAFETY BULLETIN

August 2018



SHASTA-TRINITY SCHOOLS  
INSURANCE GROUP

## WILDFIRE CLEANUP

### **DON'T BECOME A CASUALTY AFTER THE FIRE IS OUT**

Smoke, debris, and toxic ash can be just as dangerous as a fire, and the effects can sneak up on you. Before you start cleaning up the mess, think about the potential hazards and do what you can to work safely.

### **SMOKE AND ASH**

- Stay inside when the smoke is the worst.
- Limit or avoid any activity that will result in increased breathing: outdoor exercise, sports, strenuous work, etc.
- NIOSH N95 or P100 Particulate Masks are recommended for wear when cleaning up debris and ash, and at all times when hazardous air conditions exist. Don't use cheap dust masks.
- Put your car, work, and home AC units on "recirculate" instead of drawing outside air in.
- The use of indoor HEPA filters can help. Ensure all HVAC HEPA filters are checked and changed often (read manufacturers recommendations). During heavy smoke filters may only last a few days.
- Gently sweep large debris and use water on large areas of ash. **DO NOT USE A LEAFBLOWER.**
- For cleaning inside surfaces, use a damp rag, mop, or a vacuum with a HEPA filter.

### **BURNT DEBRIS**

- Do not attempt to move toxic waste, debris, burnt chemical containers, or anything that may contain asbestos. Contact your liability insurer for assistance with the removal of all burnt debris and toxins. Mark the area and keep others out.
- If you do have to move debris for any reason, ensure it does not have live embers.
- Be careful to avoid sharp nails, glass, and other hazardous debris. Wear puncture resistant boots, and thick work gloves as well as eye protection.
- Never attempt to move downed power lines or poles. Call PG&E for assistance.
- Unless you are a professional, do not attempt to cut trees down and also be prepared for weakened trees to fall unexpectedly.
- When moving bulky debris, lift with your legs. Get help when needed.

### **CHECK OUR WEBSITE FOR OTHER RESOURCES**

<http://www.stsigpa.com/>

For any questions regarding this Safety Bulletin, or requests for free onsite safety classes, please contact Kurt Walling, the Loss Prevention Manager for STSIG at [kwalling@stsig.org](mailto:kwalling@stsig.org), or 530-221-6444.

**And remember: *Stay Alert, Stay Alive!***

## **Wildland Fire Retardant Clean-Up Hints When it lands on people:**

- Wildland Fire Retardant contains ammonia and will sting if it gets into cuts or scratches or comes into contact with chapped or sunburned skin.
- Wash thoroughly with a gentle soap and water to remove all residues as many of the fire chemicals are drying to the skin.
- After washing use a good quality hand cream to minimize drying and chapping.

## **When it lands on structures:**

- Wash retardant off as soon as possible. Retardant solutions are also thickened so that the liquid will accumulate on the fuel rather than falling past the fuel onto the soil.
- Retardant solutions will generally be easy to remove from smooth surfaces. Use of a garden hose to wet the surface followed by scrubbing would be expected to clean the surface. If the retardant solution has dried and is present for several days in the hot sunshine some discoloration could result.
- Some products may discolor metal. This can arise either by corroding or cleansing the surface of metal oxides that form over a period of time subjected to weather. Corrosion generally occurs over a prolonged period. Removal of oxide films can be rather quick. Unless removed from painted surfaces before the retardant dries, it is possible that some fading may occur.
- The red color of retardants is due to the use of red iron oxide (rust) to make the retardant drop more visible to the pilots. These highly colored, fine particles can be very stubborn to remove from rough or porous surfaces such as stone and rock. Use clean-up procedures that do not have a tendency to drive the color pigment deeper into the rough, uneven surfaces. The use of high-pressure power washers is not advised.
- Dampen a stained surface with water and scrub with a soft-bristled brush. Dampen the brush and using some borax cleanser may prove to be effective. Cleaners containing enzymes have also been successful in more rapidly reducing the stickiness of the thickener in the retardant.
- Restrict water use to prevent forming standing puddles, which may be attractive to pets and animals or dilute puddles that form with copious amounts of water.
- Avoid leaving standing puddles of water by using absorbent materials such as sand, soil, or other materials. When it lands on vegetation:
  - Rinse retardant off of vegetation as soon as possible to avoid leaf "burning".
  - Retardant solutions contain vegetative fertilizers (sources of both nitrogen and phosphorus) that are considerably higher than what is generally sold at garden stores. This causes vegetation and plants to brown and appear dead after more than a few hours of contact without removal. However, they will generally recover and grow back - usually within one to two months.
- As with any garden produce, wash fruit and vegetables thoroughly before eating.