

# Returning Home After A Chemical Fire

## Precautions To Protect Your Health

Use this fact sheet if you are returning to your home after an evacuation for a chemical fire.

### 5 Key Points:

- Take photos to document the condition of your property for insurance claims.
- Take off your shoes so that you do not track particles into your home.
- When performing activities that may disturb ash or debris, wear respiratory protection.
- Those with respiratory conditions such as asthma, COPD, and heart disease may need to take extra precautions as exposure to ash in the air may trigger breathing issues.
- Wash off any ash that gets on your skin or in your eyes or mouth as soon as you can.

### Outdoor Activities:

- Do not let children play in or with items covered by the ash or debris.
- While outside playing or working in the yard, avoid hand to mouth contact and wash hands upon returning indoors.
- When mowing wear respiratory protection.
- Clean toys, swingsets, patio furniture, BBQs, and pools before use.
- Produce from the garden can be safely consumed after thoroughly washing and rinsing. Leafy vegetables can be soaked in a 10% vinegar solution to lift soil particles from produce. <https://ucanr.edu/sites/SoCo/files/337032.pdf>



### Pets:

- Keep cats indoors until cleanup is completed.
- Dogs should be kept on leash when outside, unless there is no ash/soot in the area.
- Do not let pets drink water from puddles, or drink water or eat food that was outside during the incident.
- If dogs or cats get ash on their paws or bodies, wash it off promptly.
- If pet toys were outside, wash them before use.



### Air Conditioner:

- Clean or replace your air conditioner filter to ensure that it is working efficiently and effectively. When cleaning filters wear a mask and gloves. Turn your system's "fan" or "recirculate" option on to circulate the air in your home through the filter. If you have a window air conditioner, close the outdoor air damper.
  - <https://www.epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq/wildfires-and-indoor-air-quality-iaq>
  - [https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/covid-19/wildfire\\_smoke\\_covid-19.html](https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/covid-19/wildfire_smoke_covid-19.html)

### Water:

- There is no concern with drinking water from municipal water sources
  - The nearest Rockton community water supply well is located over 1.25 miles from the site and water sampling will ensure there are no impacts.
- Private well users in the 1 mile evacuation area should contact the Winnebago County Health Department at 815-720-4100 for guidance on testing your water or if usage should be discontinued.
  - <https://www2.illinois.gov/epa/topics/drinking-water/private-well-users/Pages/well-water-testing.aspx>



## Protecting Yourself When Cleaning:

- Wear protective clothing when cleaning surfaces that may contain soot that deposited from the fire. This includes long sleeve shirts, long pants, gloves and a mask to protect yourself from the inhalation of dangerous particles.
- When wearing a mask, a disposable mask with a rating of N-95 or better is recommended during clean-up to avoid breathing in ash and other airborne particles. These can be purchased from a home/hardware store, but must be fit properly, with no gaps around the edges, for protection. An improperly fitted mask is the same as wearing no mask at all. Follow label instructions on package for proper use.
- Wear safety goggles (not safety glasses) if clean-up activities could cause ash to be released into the air.
- Wash hands regularly with soap and lukewarm water and shower regularly throughout the day when cleaning areas with ash.

## Cleaning-Up:

- Residents are encouraged to call Clean Harbors at 877-552-8942 to arrange to have the fire-related debris removed for them, rather than removing it themselves.
- If clean-up must be performed in high traffic outdoor areas, water down all visible ash with a garden hose. Do not use leaf blowers or other methods that may cause ash or debris to become airborne.
- Clean interior floors and upholstery with high efficiency particulate air (HEPA-filter) vacuum cleaners. Common household vacuum cleaners may not filter out small particles, but rather put particles back into the air where they can be inhaled.
- Hard surfaces (tile floors, countertops) can be wiped down with soapy water and rinsed. Uncovered kitchen items (pots, pans, flatware) should be washed with soapy water or run through the dishwasher.
- To clean swimming pools, remove/skim debris, recirculate through the filters, and perform routine pool maintenance (pH levels, etc.).
- Individuals should remove visible large particle debris from garden beds using gloves or a shovel and isolate the garbage in a separate container.
- Discard any food that cannot be thoroughly washed prior to consumption. Empty and clean pet food and water bowls.



### Remember:

Take pictures of the condition of your property.

For more information, call the hotline:

**815-972-7300**

[RocktonChemFire@wchd.org](mailto:RocktonChemFire@wchd.org)

**[WWW.WCHD.ORG/FIRE](http://WWW.WCHD.ORG/FIRE)**

### Remember:

Call 877-552-8942 to have fire-related debris removed.