



IMPORTANT WILDFIRE DEBRIS GUIDANCE

Update: December 31, 2021

A fire creates an unexpected emergency situation that warrants a rapid response in which normal regulatory requirements may not be prudent or practical. With the resulting large-scale loss of structures during fires, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment developed guidance to deal with debris left behind by the total or partial destruction of buildings.

Prompt cleanup of building ash and debris helps residents move forward with their lives while minimizing potential public health and environmental issues that may be exacerbated the longer the debris is left in place. In light of this situation, CDPHE has temporarily waived certain regulatory requirements that would apply under non-emergency conditions.

One of these is the requirement for testing burned buildings for asbestos-containing materials. There has never been a complete ban on the addition of asbestos fibers to building materials so even newly built buildings can have asbestos-containing materials in them. Therefore, ash and debris from burned buildings can contain asbestos fibers, as well as numerous other hazardous materials.

Guidance documents for handling buildings damaged or completely destroyed by the recent fires are available. They do not require testing buildings for asbestos-containing materials if the building is completely destroyed or is unsafe to inspect. If an owner elects not to use the fire guidance, a comprehensive inspection for asbestos-containing material must be conducted for each destroyed building. A certified Asbestos Building Inspector must submit a sampling plan for approval by CDPHE's Indoor Environment Program prior to any sampling. If asbestos is present in any of the samples, the building ash and debris is no longer eligible for the relief provided by the fire guidance documents and must be abated under the full requirements of Colorado Regulation No. 8, Part B, at a much greater expense. CDPHE encourages the use of fire guidance documents as a cost effective, expedient and safe means of handling the debris. In order to facilitate the timely and protective clean-up of building ash and debris, the minimal requirements contained in the specific wildfire guidance documents must be followed. Please contact the Indoor Environment Program at 303-692-3100 or cdphe.asbestos@state.co.us if you wish to discuss any alternative to following these documents or have any additional questions.