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<http://www.ventura.org/rma/envhealth>

## **Declaration of Local Health Emergency and Health Concerns from Home and Building Fire Ash**

VENTURA, California – On December 8, 2017, due to potential widespread toxic exposures and threats to public health and the environment that exist in the aftermath of a major wildfire disaster, the Ventura County Public Health Officer declared a Local Health Emergency to limit the public's exposure to hazardous substances.

This Declaration enables the State Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC), or the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to survey damaged properties and remove household hazardous wastes at no cost to property owners. It also enables property owners to participate in a voluntary Fire Debris Clearance program administered through the State Office of Emergency Services (OES) and CalRecycle.

The Declaration applies in the incorporated and unincorporated areas of Ventura County impacted by the Thomas fire and provides the following:

1. No removal of fire debris shall occur from properties without a hazardous material inspection conducted by either the EPA or DTSC. This does not include the removal of personal property from residential sites.
2. No debris bins shall be provided to property owners for the purposes of fire debris removal without the authorization of the Ventura County Environmental Health Division.
3. Property owners that opt out of the Fire Debris Clearance Program must obtain permission from the Ventura County Environmental Health Division before beginning the removal of fire debris to ensure the private debris removal, transport, and disposal is conducted in a manner that does not endanger the community.

The public is advised that the combustion of building materials such as siding, roofing tiles, and insulation can create dangerous ash and dust particles that may contain asbestos, heavy metals, and other hazardous substances. Household hazardous substances such as paint, gasoline, cleaning products, pesticides, compressed gas cylinders, and chemicals may have been stored in homes, garages, or sheds that may have burned or released in the fire, also producing hazardous substances. Exposure to these substances when residents search through debris for personal items, and during fire debris removal activities may lead to acute and chronic health effects, and may cause long-term public health and environmental impacts.

The County Environmental Health Division is currently working with the DTSC to gather more information about the state program and the timing of its operation in Ventura County. As information is gathered, it will be posted along with other recovery information on the County's *venturacountyrecovers.org* web site. In addition, if property owners with fire debris on their property would like to receive debris removal information directly as it becomes available, they may register via the *venturacountyrecovers.org* web site.

For health-related questions, please contact Ventura County Public Health at (805) 981-5101.

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