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SAFETY ALERT

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RESPONDING TO WILDFIRE ASH IN SCHOOLS

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As a result of wildfires, many schools have asked how to handle ash and other particulate matter that has accumulated in classrooms and on school campuses. According to the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, ash from wildfires is relatively non-toxic and similar to that found in home fireplaces; however, it may be irritating to the skin, nose and throat. Sensitive individuals may experience more severe health effects. Do not allow children to play in or around ash. Limit outdoor activities and strenuous indoor exercise while ash is present or during unhealthy air quality days.

During a Fire Episode

- Take action to minimize ash accumulation indoors.
- Keep classroom doors and windows closed as much as possible.
- Set the air conditioning system to "on" which will filter much of the particulates.
- Keep walkways and building entrances free of ash to reduce the amount of debris tracked into buildings. It is also recommended to place doormats at building entrances.

Precautions During Clean-up

- **Avoid any actions that would make the ash airborne such as using a leaf blower.**
- Wear gloves, long sleeved shirts and long pants to avoid skin contact.
- A surgical-type mask may be worn to avoid breathing in ash and other airborne particles.

Ash Clean-up

- Gentle sweeping of indoor and outdoor surfaces, followed by wet mopping is recommended.
- Building exteriors and outdoor areas may be cleaned with a water hose and spray nozzle using as little water as possible. Avoid washing ash into storm drains whenever possible.
- Heavy ash residue may be swept into piles, placed in plastic bags and disposed of in the regular trash. Bagging will help to minimize the generation of dust as the material dries and is emptied from the refuse bin.
- Remove indoor residual ash with a damp cloth by wiping down horizontal surfaces and walls.

- Use of shop vacuums and household vacuums is not advised unless they contain HEPA filters because they can blow small particles into the air. Similarly, yard sweepers and vacuums are also not recommended.
- Wash toys and other soiled items before allowing children to play with them.
- Discard food that has not been stored in waterproof or airtight containers. This includes products that have been stored in cardboard or other soft packaging.
- Clean food containers before opening and transfer the contents to another container before eating.

Weather conditions can cause ash to fall for an extended time period even after the wildfire is extinguished. As a result, daily inspections should be made to determine if additional cleaning is necessary.

Inquiries may be directed to the Office of Environmental Health and Safety at (213) 241-3199.

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