

Health and Food Concerns after a Wildfire



Uinta County Public Health is here to promote health and wellness throughout the year. During the past few days the start of the **Tokewanna Fire** has prompted some concerns. We hope this brief will help you make some decisions over the next days, weeks and months. The hazardous fire conditions may exist for quite some time after the initial fire is extinguished.

If you still have questions, please contact one of the online links attached, or call our office Monday through Friday at 307-787-3800 or 789-9203 or my 24/7 number of 307-799-5907.

Health concerns:

Wildfire Smoke Risks- Smoke is made up of a number of components. The unhealthiest material in smoke from a wildfire is the small particles in the smoke. They may make it harder to breathe, or make you cough. It is most dangerous for the young, elderly, and those with chronic conditions such as Asthma, COPD, Chronic Bronchitis and Congestive Heart Failure. Even if you are young and healthy, you can be affected by several factors: Length of time you are exposed, how much air you breathe in, and the concentration of smoke in the air. People in sports or strenuous outdoor work may also be more susceptible, because they are breathing in more deeply and rapidly. Risks increase the longer time you are exposed. Many conditions can affect the level or smoke in the air including fire conditions and weather conditions such as wind speed and direction.

Watch For:	What can I do?
Red, Sore Eyes Excessive Tears	Monitor for smoky haze, odor, low visibility
Cough Runny Nose	Limit outdoor activities when possible
Extended exposure (days or weeks), or heavy smoke concentrations	Stay inside, keep windows and doors closed. Set your air conditioner to “recirculate” and keep it running. If no air conditioner, spend time in a place that does have air conditioning.
Worsening symptoms of chronic diseases	In your car/truck, keep windows closed and system set to “recirculate”
	Don’t burn candles, gas or wood stoves
	Run room air cleaners with HEPA filters
Concentrations of smoke can cause lung problems and a longer lasting cough which may lead to a more serious condition. See your healthcare provider if you have concerns about your health, or any of the following: Shortness of Breath, or a Cough that is persistent or worsening, Chest pain or tightness, Significant weakness or fatigue.	

Clean-up concerns:

Most clean up after a fire can be accomplished with regular soap and water and a little elbow grease. A little Baking Soda can help take the smell of the fire from affected surfaces. **DO NOT** mix chemicals, especially anything with Chlorine Bleach (scented or unscented)!

****IMPORTANT!!!** If your home has been stained by the **SLURRY** (it will appear red on your home/property) dropped from the airplane, special precautions need to be taken to avoid a secondary deadly exposure!
DO NOT use bleach on slurry – simply wash with a **pressure washer and plain water** only.

Chemicals can change within prepared products after exposure to extreme heat, or prolonged heat. It is safer for humans, plants and animals to throw away chemicals and purchase new ones.

DO: Wear a face mask and rubber or nitrile gloves during cleaning. You should also wear a non-permeable apron or coveralls to protect your clothing and underlying skin. Be sure to shower as soon as possible after your are finished for the day, or if irritation is felt while cleaning.

Food Safety:

Refrigerated/Frozen Foods- Whenever power is off for a period of over 4 hours, several steps must be taken to ensure food is safe to be eaten, even in the refrigerator or freezer. Generally, during a power outage, refrigerated food is safe to eat if the temperature inside remained at 40° F or lower, and the power was off no more than 4 hours.

Frozen foods can be safe if the freezer is full and the doors were not opened. A full Freezer can keep food for about 48 hours, only 24 hours if it is half full. You should check the internal temperature if possible, otherwise, check EACH frozen item and if the food still contains ice crystals or is 40° F or below, it is safe to refreeze or cook. DO NOT rely on appearance or odor!

You should **DISCARD** any perishable food (such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs, or leftovers), that have been at temperatures above 40° F for 2 hours or more (or 1 hour if temperatures are above 90° F).

****IMPORTANT** –Perishable food such as meat, poultry, seafood, milk and eggs that are not kept adequately refrigerated or frozen may cause illness if consumed, even when they are thoroughly cooked!

Consuming dangerous foodborne bacteria will usually cause illness within 1 to 3 days of eating the contaminated food. However, sickness can also occur with 20 minutes, or up to 6 weeks later. Although most people will recover from a foodborne illness within a short period of time, some can develop chronic, severe, or even life-threatening health problems. Foodborne illness can sometimes be confused with other illnesses that have similar symptoms. The symptoms of foodborne illness can include:

Watch For:	What can I do?
Vomiting	Contact your healthcare provider
Diarrhea	
Abdominal Pain	
Flu-like symptoms, such as fever, headache and body aches.	

Water Safety:

Use only water from a safe source for drinking and washing, or preparing food.

Use bottled water that has not been exposed to chemicals, high heat, or flood waters for drinking and brushing teeth, etc.

.If you don't have bottled water, you should **BOIL OR DISINFECT** water to make it safe (steps below)

If you have a well that may be contaminated, the water should be tested and disinfected after the event.

Contact local officials for where and how to have your well water tested.

If the well water is cloudy, first filter it through clean cloths, or allow it to settle and then draw off the clear water for boiling/disinfecting. Then, follow one of these two procedures:

Boiling- Bring the water to a full, rolling boil for 1 minute. Let it cool, and store it in clean containers with covers.

Disinfecting with Bleach- Add 1/8 teaspoon (or 8 drops) of unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of water.

Stir it well and let stand for at least 30 minutes before using.

Store disinfected water in clean containers with covers.

References/Links:

<http://www.fda.gov/> <https://www.ready.gov/wildfires> <http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/returnhome.asp>

Mental Health Matters:

You are undergoing some VERY stressful times. It is understandable to have some feelings of loss which may become overwhelming. The County has a team of mental health professionals to help you cope. Watch for a separate release covering these concerns.