

Public Health Information – Ash from CCA-treated Timber

What is CCA-treated timber?

“CCA” stands for copper chrome arsenate. It is a wood preservative that is fixed into the timber giving it a distinctive, pale green colour that fades to grey over time.

CCA-treated timber is commonly used in private and public recreation areas for pergolas, decking, cubby houses, claddings, posts, gates, fencing and landscaping purposes. It poses very low health risks for normal use.

What happens to CCA-treated timber when it is burnt?

In the event of a bushfire, structures made from CCA-treated timber are damaged or destroyed. If you know that you had structures made from CCA-treated timber, when cleaning up the ash, remember:

- The remaining ash and char can contain up to 10% (by weight) arsenic, copper and chromium. This ash may pose a health hazard if it is swallowed by young children or grazing animals.
- It is not possible to tell if ash contains arsenic just by looking at it. If you had CCA-treated timber structures before the fire you should assume the ash will contain arsenic, chromium and copper.

Precautions for young children and farm animals

Young children are more likely to put the ash in their mouths, and swallowing only a few grams of ash is harmful. Farm animals may also lick or swallow the salty ash residue. Children, pets and farm animals should be kept away from CCA ash until it is cleaned up.

Collection and Disposal of CCA Ash

- **CCA ash should be collected** and taken to an EPA-approved landfill site for disposal.
- **Do NOT bury CCA ash** or other building waste on your property, in nearby gullies etc. This practice could contaminate your land or water and potentially expose your family, animals and the broader environment.

- **Ash** can be double-bagged, sealed and taken directly to your local landfill. Timber can be disposed at landfill also. Contact your Council for specific advice or local requirements. Contact your EPA regional office for advice.

Personal Protection When Collecting Ash

- Do not touch the ash with your bare skin. Wear gloves and consider wearing disposable overalls.
- Wear a disposable paper dust mask to minimise dust getting in your mouth.
- Moisten the ash prior to handling it to minimise dust.
- Use a shovel to pick up ash — **DO NOT** spread it around.
- Remove and wash clothing and clean your shoes.
- Wash your hands after finishing clean-up work and before eating, smoking, preparing food or picking up young children.

Health Symptoms

- Eating CCA ash can cause nausea and/or vomiting, diarrhoea and a “pins and needles” feeling in the skin.
- If you have or anyone in your family has these symptoms (and the potential for swallowing of ash exists) seek medical attention as soon as possible.

FURTHER ADVICE

For information about:

Transport and disposal of CCA ash - contact the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) on (03) 9695 2722

Domestic garbage requirements and landfill locations - contact your local Council.

CCA and farm animal health - contact your local Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Animal Health Advisor on 136 186.

Fencing - Contact DPI on 136 186

CCA and human health - contact DoH Environmental Health Unit on 1300 761 874.

Prepared by the Department of Health in conjunction with the Victorian Environment Protection Authority.