

# Unite & Recover

Mine fire recovery 2014

## Cleaning up - *what you need to know*

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**For more information:**

Community Information  
and Recovery Centre  
1800 017 777  
20 Hazelwood Road, Morwell

recovery.vic.gov.au  
latrobe.vic.gov.au  
health.vic.gov.au  
epa.vic.gov.au  
worksafe.vic.gov.au  
esv.vic.gov.au

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*The information contained within this document has been provided by the Department of Health, Department of Human Services, Environment Protection Authority, Victorian Work Cover Authority (WorkSafe), Energy Safe Victoria, Gippsland Water and Latrobe City Council. Information is correct as at March 2014*

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### What is ash?

When coal is burnt, any particles that don't completely burn or are too large to stay in the air fall as ash.

### Will ash damage my health?

Testing by the EPA has shown that the ash from this fire is similar to ash you'd find in a fireplace. While the ash does not pose a health concern, clean-up activities can potentially stir up the ash and be a nuisance. Ash may irritate your eyes, nose or throat and may also be a mild skin irritant.

Ash particles are too big to be breathed deep into the lungs, however if you have a lung condition you may be more sensitive to ash that is stirred up into the air. Try to avoid the ash and ask friends or family to help you clean.

### Do I need to wear protective clothing?

The Department of Health recommends that you wear gloves, mask, goggles, long sleeved shirts and pants when cleaning to keep the ash out of your eyes and mouth and stop it sticking to your skin. If you do get ash on your skin, wash it off with normal soap and water. A mask must be fitted properly with a good seal for it to be effective. Please refer to the Department of Health face mask fact sheet or video for more information.

### Can I have help cleaning up?

It is recommended that you contact your insurance company to discuss your cover and potential to make a claim.

A professional cleaning service is available for residents who are unable to clean. This service will be available to:

- Existing Home and Community Care clients
- People who are assessed as having 'high needs' because of their age, a disability or a current health condition (to request an assessment, please phone 1800 017 777)
- People who recently received relocation grants from DHS

Other residents can access:

- One clean up kit per Morwell residence, including:
  - Information on how to clean
  - Bucket
  - Mask/s
  - Gloves
  - 1 x voucher for laundry (on request)
  - 2 x vouchers for car washing (on request)

Clean up kits are available from the Community Information and Recovery Centre.

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- HEPA filter vacuum cleaners, available for loan from:
  - Community Information and Recovery Centre - 1800 017 777  
22 Hazelwood Road Morwell
  - ProRent - 5133 6888  
1 Saskia Way Morwell
  - Morwell Neighbourhood House - 5134 5488  
48 - 50 Beattie Crescent Morwell
  - Berry Street - 5134 5971  
37 Elgin St, Morwell
  - Salvation Army - 5133 9890  
57 Bridle Rd, Morwell

You may need to make a booking in advance as they are in high demand.

### How should I clean up the ash?

#### Hard Surfaces

Wipe down or mop hard surfaces, such as benches and tiled floors, as sweeping may just put the ash back into the air. Wash cooking utensils and ornaments in detergent and hot water. If you cannot put ornaments in water, wipe with a damp cloth. Clean extraction fans in kitchens and bathrooms by using warm soapy water and a soft brush to gently scrub fan blades and covers. Make sure children's toys and play areas are clean.

A combination of water and mild soap or detergent will remove most ash. Always follow the instructions on any cleaning products you use.

#### Clothing and Soft Furnishings

Wash removable items, such as bedding, curtains and clothing according to the instructions on the tag. We understand that you may have a lot of laundry to wash, or may need access to a bigger machine for larger items. Laundry vouchers are available from the Community Information and Recovery Centre.

Furniture with soft coverings, such as couches and chairs, should be aired outside in the sun where possible to help remove the odour of smoke and ash. Mattresses can be professionally cleaned, but once you've washed the bedding, this may not be needed. Ensure you seek help from family and friends if you are lifting or moving heavy items to prevent injury and follow the manual handling advice provided by the Victorian Work Cover Authority.

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### Carpets

Carpets should be thoroughly vacuumed with a vacuum cleaner that is fitted with a turbo-head attachment and HEPA filter, which traps the ash inside the machine so it can be removed from your home. For effective disposal, bag type cleaners are best and you should replace the bag once it is 75% full. If your vacuum does not have a turbo-head attachment or HEPA filter fitted, you can borrow one to complete your initial clean up.

### Cars

You should not need to wash your car any differently to the way you normally wash it. Give your car a good hose down using a trigger nozzle with clean water to remove any traces of ash or dust before washing with soapy water and rinsing. Car washing vouchers are available from the Community Information and Recovery Centre.

### Roofs, Gutters and Facades

You may not need to clean your roof or gutters, as recent rain should have washed away most of the ash. If your roof or gutters need cleaning, the Victorian Work Cover Authority recommends that you clean them by hosing them from ground level or use extendable cleaning tools that allow you to work from ground level where possible. If you need to work from heights, a work platform is recommended. If the cleaning work is extensive or difficult, consider employing a professional cleaning company.

If you choose to use a high pressure cleaner take extra care to avoid risk of injury.

High pressure cleaners must not be used to clean materials containing asbestos, as the pressure can damage the material and release asbestos fibres. If unsure, do not use a high pressure cleaner until you seek professional advice. For more information on asbestos go to: [www.asbestos.vic.gov.au](http://www.asbestos.vic.gov.au)

Do not use water around electrical equipment such as switch boxes and power boards.

Any electrical tools used for cleaning must be maintained in good working order and used as per the manufacturer's instructions.

If using a ladder:

- Use a ladder that is the right size for the job
- Place the ladder on a firm surface (not on soft, soggy or slippery ground)
- Make sure the ladder is stable and secure
- Be aware of anyone working below and the potential for things to fall on them

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### Solar Panels

There is no need to wash your solar panels any differently to the cleaning instructions provided by the manufacturer. Contact the manufacturer or your supplier if you do not have these cleaning instructions.

### Heaters and Air Conditioners

Check your manufacturer's instructions before cleaning your air conditioner or heater. If your heater or air conditioner has a removable filter ensure this is vacuumed and free from dust.

Electrical and gas appliances should be cleaned and serviced by a licensed tradesperson. If you have a gas heater, it is a good idea to have your heater and flue serviced by a professional gasfitter every two years.

### Water Tanks

If the water tastes, looks or smells unusual do not use it for drinking, bathing or for pets. If the tank water is your only supply for drinking, you can have your water tested. Sample kits are available from the Community Information and Recovery Centre, 22 Hazelwood Road Morwell. If the water quality does not meet the appropriate standard, your tank will be cleaned as required and the water replaced.

### Are there cleaning products I shouldn't be using?

There is no need to worry about chemical reactions as testing of the ash has shown that it is similar to materials in the soil in your garden. Follow the instructions on the product label of any cleaning products you are using.

### Will cleaning the ash damage the environment?

Similar to the ash left in your fireplace, the elements found in the ash provide good nutrients for your garden beds and compost. If you are hosing down outside areas, such as your driveway, pavers or your home, direct the run-off towards your lawn.

If you do not wish to use the ash on your garden, it can also be collected in a plastic bag or other container and put in the usual household garbage bin.

### What about water restrictions?

Victoria does have Permanent Water Saving Rules in place. However, Gippsland Water advises that you are permitted to use water outdoors for cleaning purposes for health and safety reasons such as removing ash (which can cause surfaces to be slippery and may cause irritation).