

Bush Fire Recovery Information

Copper Chrome Arsenate (CCA) – Burnt Timber and Ash

What is CCA-treated timber?

Copper chrome arsenate (CCA) is a wood preservative that is fixed into timber and used to protect wood from rotting, fungi and insects. Freshly treated CCA timber can be identified by its yellow/greenish colour which fades to grey over time. It is not always easy to identify if a product is CCA-treated timber and if in doubt it is important to treat the timber as if it does contain CCA.

CCA-treated timber has been commonly used in private and public recreation areas for pergolas, decking, cubby houses, claddings, posts, gates, fencing and landscaping purposes.

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

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

- the ash contains copper, chromium and arsenic
- this ash may pose a health hazard if it is inhaled or swallowed, especially by children or grazing animals and
- it is essential to wear personal protective equipment (PPE) such as gloves and dust masks.

How can ash affect my health?

Although ash is too large to be breathed into the lungs, ash particles can irritate the eyes, nose and throat.

Ash can also be accidentally swallowed. If the ash originates from CCA treated timber it may contain arsenic. Swallowing just a few grams of CCA treated timber ash may be damaging to your health.

Immediate symptoms of arsenic poisoning include nausea, abdominal pain, vomiting and diarrhoea, followed by a “pins and needles” feeling in the skin.

What can I do to protect my health?

To avoid unnecessary exposure to ash, practice good hygiene and use personal protection when cleaning up ash from CCA-treated timber.

If you come into contact with ash, wash it off your hands, face and neck as needed. If ash gets in your eyes, gently wash out your eyes with clean water.

If you or anyone in your family experience symptoms or is suspected to have swallowed ash from CCA-treated timber, seek medical attention immediately.

Children should be kept away from ash until clean-up is complete

Young children are more likely to swallow ash. As a precaution, children, pets and farm animals should be kept away from areas impacted by ash from CCA-treated timber.

Personal protection when collecting ash from CCA-treated timber

- You should wear gloves and consider wearing disposable overalls when handling CCA-treated timber ash.
- Wear a disposable dust mask (P1 or P2 dust masks are available from hardware stores) to minimise breathing in dust.
- Wear safety glasses to prevent exposure to the eyes.
- Moisten the ash prior to handling it to minimise dust.
- When cleaning up dust do not work in windy conditions or work up-wind.
- Use a shovel to pick up ash — do not spread it around or wash it down the drain or sewer.
- Remove and discard disposable coveralls and/or wash clothing and clean your shoes before reuse.
- Wash your hands after finishing clean-up work & before eating, smoking, preparing food or picking up young children.

Collection and disposal of CCA-treated timber ash

- Do not bury CCA-treated timber ash or other building waste.
- Small amounts of CCA-treated timber ash can be placed in a sealed plastic bag and disposed of at your local waste transfer station.
- Fire affected CCA timber along with larger amounts of ash can be taken to your local Transfer Station. **Ash must be double bagged and sealed** to ensure material is contained during transport and handling.
- Do not put CCA timber or ash in your garden organics bin.
- Contact your local council for advice on local requirements or the NSW EPA for further

advice on the environmental effects of CCA-treated timber.

Retaining walls

- The replacement of any retaining walls may be covered by your insurance policy, but residents need to check with their insurer. The replacement of landscaping/retaining walls is not covered under government clean-up funding.
- Replacement of retaining walls greater than 600mm in height may need approval from council.

For further information:

- Call your local council for more information on recovery and the collection and disposal of waste on your property.
- For CCA-treated timber and human health questions contact your local Public Health Unit on 1300 066 055.