

Ash from copper chrome arsenate (CCA) treated timber

Public health bushfire information

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, and to resist leaching. Freshly treated CCA timber can be identified by its yellow/greenish colour, which fades to grey over time.

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:

- it is not possible to tell if ash contains arsenic just by looking at it, so you should treat the ash as containing copper, chromium and arsenic
- the remaining ash and char can contain up to 10% (by weight) copper, chromium and arsenic. This ash may pose a health hazard if it is swallowed by young children or grazing animals.

Precautions for young children and farm animals

Young children may put ash in their mouths. Swallowing only a few grams of CCA-treated timber ash can be harmful. Breathing in ash dust can also pose a risk. Farm animals may also lick or swallow the salty ash residue. Children, pets and farm animals should be kept away from CCA-treated timber ash until it is cleaned up.

Collection and disposal of CCA-treated timber ash

CCA-treated timber ash should be collected and taken to landfill for disposal.

Do not bury CCA-treated timber ash or other building waste. This practice could contaminate your land or water and potentially expose your family, animals and the broader environment.

Small amounts of CCA-treated timber ash can be disposed in the rubbish bin. Larger amounts of ash can be double-bagged, sealed and taken directly to landfill. Damaged timber can also be disposed at landfill. Contact your council for advice.



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 (P2 dust masks are available from most hardware stores) to minimise breathing in dust.
- Moisten the ash prior to handling it to minimise dust.
- Use a shovel to pick up ash — do not spread it around.
- Remove and discard disposable coveralls and/or wash clothing and clean your shoes before reuse.
- Wash your hands after finishing clean-up work and before eating, smoking, preparing food or picking up young children.

Health effects

- Swallowing CCA-treated timber ash can cause nausea and/or vomiting, diarrhoea and a “pins and needles” feeling in the skin.
- If you or anyone in your family has these symptoms (or you suspect someone has swallowed CCA- treated timber ash) seek medical attention as soon as possible.

For further information

Call 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84) at any time.

Contact 13 QGOV (13 74 68) for your nearest Public Health Unit.

Your doctor

If you or anyone in your household is experiencing any health effects from the smoky conditions seek medical advice from your doctor.

Queensland Health acknowledges the State of Victoria, Health and Human Services, for permission to use their fact sheet content.