

Fact sheet: ash and water tanks



Environment
Protection
Authority Victoria



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Fact sheet

Overview

Smoke consists of particles that weren't burnt completely. When the particles fall from the air, they collect on surfaces as soot and ash. Smoke can linger after a fire, which means that soot and ash can continue to settle around your home and garden for several days after the fire has been extinguished.

Water tanks

If you live in a bushfire-affected area, and you use a private water source such as a water tank, you should be aware that your water supply may become contaminated with debris, ash, soot, fire retardants or dead animals.

Water drawn from deep bores or wells should still be safe to use.

If the water from your rainwater tank tastes, looks or smells unusual, don't use it for drinking, bathing or for pets.

If you suspect contamination, use an alternative water supply for drinking and food preparation. Contact your local council for a list of water carting contractors.

The town water supply is safe to use for drinking and all domestic uses.

Preventing water tank contamination

The most effective way to prevent contamination of your water tank is to make sure it is properly sealed and to disconnect the downpipes to the tank as soon as there is a bushfire risk. Do not reconnect the downpipes until the roof has been cleaned after the bushfire, either manually or after a flush of rain.

Further information

Contact EPA on
1300 372 842
(1300 EPA VIC)
or epa.vic.gov.au

- Incident information and updates:
emergency.vic.gov.au
- Up-to-date air quality information:
epa.vic.gov.au/airwatch
- Information about the impacts of smoke:
epa.vic.gov.au/smoke
- Cleaning up after a fire:
betterhealth.vic.gov.au
- Emergency information:
epa.vic.gov.au/our-work/emergency-information
- For more information about the health risks of ash, and about cleaning up ash, see the *Ash* fact sheet (EPA publication 1724)



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Is my water tank contaminated?

If your water looks, smells or tastes unusual, then it is likely to be contaminated. Do not use the water for drinking or food preparation, and do not give it to animals.

Water that is not suitable for drinking can still be used on the garden. Water testing is not necessary, as contamination is easily identified by a change in taste, smell or clarity.

Debris or dead animals on your roof or in the gutters should be removed. Use gloves and place in a plastic bag for disposal. Only clean the ash and debris from your roof and gutters when it is safe to do so.

Your tank water should be disinfected before reusing.

Disinfecting tank water

Water can be disinfected by bringing it to a rolling boil or by adding chlorine. For every 1,000 litres of water in the tank, you can safely add either:

- approximately 125 ml or 125 g of 4 per cent household bleach. Avoid using bleaches that contain detergents or other chemicals, such as perfumes
- approximately 40 ml or 40 g of 12.5 per cent liquid swimming pool chlorine or dairy factory chlorine
- approximately 8 ml or 8 g of 65 per cent granular 'swimming pool' chlorine.

After chlorinating, you should wait at least 24 hours before using the water to allow for harmful microorganisms to be treated.

Do I need to clean my water tank after a fire?

It should not be necessary to clean your tank after a fire unless it is grossly polluted or smells and tastes unusual as a result of aerial fire retardants.

Alternatively, you can arrange for your tank to be professionally cleaned. Where cleaning involves entering a tank, consider employing a professional tank cleaner. Tanks are confined spaces and can be dangerous to work in. Refer to your local business directory for water tank cleaners.