

# Volcanic ashfall outdoor clean-up advice for households

If Mount Spurr Volcano erupts, populated areas are likely to receive up to about ¼ inch of ashfall. This amount of ash is not considered a major safety hazard. With a few easy-to-follow steps Alaskans can protect themselves, mitigate damage to their homes and vehicles, and safely clean-up their property and outdoor areas.

## SAFETY FIRST

- **Clearing ash from a rooftop is an unnecessary risk.** ¼ inch of ashfall is not considered a roof collapse hazard. Every year, Alaskans are killed or seriously injured by falls. Use fall protection equipment when accessing a pitched roof or climbing on ladders. Consider hiring a professional if roof work is necessary.
- For cleaning up outdoors, wear protective equipment.
  - A properly fitted N95 face mask or equivalent
  - Goggles without side vents (or tape the side vents)
  - Long clothing (overalls are ideal)
  - Sturdy footwear such as boots
  - Gloves such as gardening gloves
- Be aware that ash clean-up can be physically demanding. Ash is much heavier than people expect, and strain injuries are common. Avoid overfilling ash storage containers as they will be too heavy to safely lift or use wheelbarrows to move loads of ash.
- As a precaution, people with pre-existing respiratory conditions such as asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) should not help with clean-up. This is because ash can be lifted into the air by clean-up activities such as sweeping ash, where it can become a breathing hazard.

## GENERAL NOTES

- DO NOT put ash into storm drains.
- Follow all advice and instructions from the local municipality or boroughs.
- Use water very sparingly for clean-up to avoid depleting water supplies. Clean up with shovels and brooms rather than a hose. Check with your water utility for supply updates.
- Use of leaf blowers is not recommended because it produces clouds of airborne ash.
- Where possible, coordinate cleanup with your neighbors.
- Repeated cleanups may be necessary.

## USEFUL EQUIPMENT FOR CLEANUP

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| ● A supply of N95 masks and goggles                | ● 5-gallon buckets (paint buckets) or heavy-duty bags for collecting ash |
| ● Broom, shovel, wheelbarrow                       |  |
| ● Workshop vacuum cleaner with dust filter and bag | ● Towels and rags  |

This document was developed by the Alaska Volcano Observatory and State of Alaska Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Management.

## **CLEANING UP OUTDOORS**

- Clean up outdoors first to limit ash entering your house.
- Avoid remobilization ash during clean up, for hard surfaces such as decks, driveways, and sidewalks, clearing of ash is suggested to minimize ash entry into your house and remobilization. Lightly wet the surface of the ash then use a broom to sweep it up. Avoid dry sweeping or use of blowers as this can create high levels of airborne ash. Do not soak the ash as it can set like cement and be very difficult to clean up.
- Expected ashfall amounts will not cause structural problems for roofs, so removing ash from roofs is not recommended due to possible falling hazards. Allow rain or winds to naturally remove ash from roofs. If you decide it is necessary to remove ash from your roof, consider hiring a qualified professional and/or use fall protection.
- For heating, ventilation and air-conditioning (HVAC) units, vacuum or gently blow away excess ash from air intakes, then wipe down with a damp cloth. Wait until outdoor areas are clear of ash before restarting HVAC units.
- For lawns and gardens and green spaces, small amounts of ash (about 1/8 inch) can be left to be incorporated into the soil or compost as a nutrient.
- Clean the outside of your house (e.g., windowsills) that you can reach easily by sweeping ash off with a brush or broom.
- If it can be done safely, clear ash gently from solar panels using soapy water and a soft brush. Using a long-handled window-cleaning brush may be a good option.

## **KEEPING ASH OUT OF YOUR HOUSE**

- Leave your ashy clothing and footwear outside or in an arctic entry or garage.
- Lay damp towels at door thresholds to prevent ash being tracked indoors.
- Close doors and windows tightly to prevent ash from entering your house. Secure other openings such as cat/dog doors as well. Use indoor air purifiers, if you have one.
- Turn down (or off) heating systems that use outside air during the ashfall events. Monitor air filters and clean or replace if they accumulate ash. If accessible, clean areas around heating system air intake. Check with a heating system professional or manufacturer for additional recommendations.

## **WHAT TO DO WITH THE ASH YOU'VE CLEANED UP**

- Follow recommendations from your solid waste provider. They may recommend NOT disposing of it in your garbage can. Ash is heavy and may exceed the maximum weight capacity of the garbage can. For example, a typical 5 gallon bucket full of ash can weigh 60-80 pounds, depending if the ash is dry or wet.
- DO NOT dispose of collected ash into stormwater drains. It can cause blockages which are very difficult to remove, and this can lead to flooding and other impacts.
- Small amounts of collected ash (1/8 inch or less) can be spread as a thin layer over your lawn, garden or green spaces by raking it in. Rainfall will help wash it into the soil.
- If larger amounts of ash are collected from your property, store in covered containers for future use or disposal.