

Eco-Tip for 12-17-17

Fire Damage: Avoid Toxic Exposure for People and Wildlife

By David Goldstein, Ventura County Public Works Agency, IWMD

Residents eager to return to a normal life following the fires may be tempted to begin cleanup immediately. Instead, additional preparation can save money and reduce risks.

In declaring a local health emergency last Tuesday, the Ventura County Board of Supervisors enabled state agencies to launch a program providing free testing of disaster debris and free property clean-up if homes were completely destroyed by the Thomas Fire. Even if your home was not built with asbestos or originally painted with lead-based paint, substances from a wide variety of other building materials may make your ash a hazardous substance.

State officials are beginning property clean-up efforts Monday, December 18 and expect to conclude countywide clean-up efforts by mid-April, 2018.

Consequently, countywide, fire debris can be legally removed only after an inspection by state designated personnel and, most likely, a County approved debris clean-up plan. Details of this program are still being developed and will be posted at venturacountyrecovers.org. Information is also available at (805) 981-5101.

In addition to the many homes lost in recent fires, thousands of acres of wildlife habitat were also lost. Fortunate people have insurance policies and public agencies to help with rebuilding, but it will take years before vegetation grows back to sustain eco-systems. The web of life on wild lands, from plants and insects, to birds and bobcats, will strain to cope with new circumstances.

One way people can help is to switch away from toxic substances and to mechanical and exclusion methods of rodent control. Following a fire, fleeing mice and rats tend to infest new areas. If homeowners near burn areas react to rodent problems by using poison, they risk posing new dangers to wildlife. Anti-coagulants kill mice and rats through internal bleeding, but poisoned pests take a long time to die, and in the meantime, they often become food for wildlife ranging from mountain lions to birds of prey, potentially spreading the poison up the food chain.

On Monday December 18 at 7 PM at the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza, a documentary, *The Cat That Changed America*, will profile one of the most charismatic representatives of wildlife in history. The powerfully presented story of P-22, the mountain lion famous for crossing both the 405 and 101 freeways to end up living in Griffith Park, will likely convince many people to change their methods of rodent control.

Methods of pest control designed to avoid infestations in the first place are categorized as "exclusion" methods, which include sealing off potential home entry points with wire

mesh. Trim trees overhanging your roof and avoid dense growth capable of sheltering rats. Keep pet food secured and clean up pet dropping promptly.

Mechanical methods of pest control range from simple, classic snap traps to newer traps using electric shocks to kill pests. Some people mistake plastic bait traps for a mechanical trap, but generally, the large, plastic boxes with holes for rodents to crawl into are bait stations. The rodents do not die inside. Instead, they leave after consuming poison, potentially becoming prey for animals not targeted for poison.

If your mechanical traps are not catching rodents, rather than switching to poison, consider optimizing the traps. Set traps in pairs along a wall with the trip pads pointing in opposite directions, and use a proven effective bait, such as peanut butter. Also, since mice nibbles do not always trigger traps meant for rats, use both sized traps if you are not sure which type of infestation is in your home.

PoisonFreeMalibu.org provides data about the effects of poisoning on wildlife and alternatives for rodent control, and The Santa Monica Mountains Fund's "Breaking the Poison Chain" campaign provides explanations of non-toxic methods of rodent control. (see www.samofund.org/takethepledge).

The Cat that Changed America also focuses on people involved in an effort to expand wildlife habitat by building a vegetated bridge across a local freeway.

On the net:

www.thecatthatchangedamerica.com

www.samofund.org/takethepledge

www.PoisonFreeMalibu.org

<http://www.ojairaptorcenter.org/>

<http://www.humanecontrol.com/trapping.html>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Epe4DXA1yow>

Watch *The Cat that Changed America* trailer [here](#)

<https://www.savelacougars.org>

[Movie Poster](#)