

Guidelines on Preparedness Before, During and After an Ashfall

The National Office of Disaster Services (NODS) urges the public to be prepared in the event of an ash fall. This information sheet provides very useful information including volcanic ash health risks, maintenance of vehicles, and ash clean-up.

Protect yourself and Your Property during Ash fall Emergency

- When you hear that a volcanic ash fall is occurring, stay inside or seek shelter.
- Avoid driving. If you must drive, make sure you drive carefully, leaving plenty of clearance between your car and the ones ahead you.
- Protect your lungs and eyes. Wear a mask, even inside. If you don't have a mask, use a cloth to filter volcanic ash particles. Wear goggles. Remove your contact lenses, and use eyeglasses instead.
- Turn on the radio to keep up with any emergency updates and clean-up plans. (You should have a battery-operated radio on hand as part of your emergency preparedness kit.)

- Take care when drinking water during and after an ash fall. Pour drinking water into a container, let it settle, and use the clear water for drinking and cleaning. If it tastes bad, don't drink it. Clean up the ash only according to advised methods of volcanic ash cleanup and disposal.

What can you do to protect yourself against ash?

- **Limit driving.** Immediately after an ash fall, even a light one, driving conditions, visibility and air quality can be dramatically affected, especially by the re-suspension of ash by traffic. Rainfall has a sudden but temporary effect in improving air quality until the ash dries out again. We recommend that, following an ash fall, you refrain from driving and stay indoors if possible. If you must drive, maintain a large distance from the vehicle in front of you and drive slowly.
- **Reduce ash in your home.** Keep all doors and windows closed whenever possible.

- **Drinking water.** After light ash fall it is usually safe to drink water contaminated with ash, but it is better to filter off the ash particles before drinking. However, ash increases the chlorine requirement in disinfected surface-collected water which, therefore, can be microbiologically unsafe to drink. Ash will usually make drinking water unpalatable before it presents a health risk. The safest way to ensure your well-being is to stock up on water prior to the event - collect enough drinking water for at least a week (one gallon per person per day).
- **Home-grown food.** Ash-covered vegetables grown in fields are safe to eat after washing with clean water.
- **Protection.** Those undertaking clean-up operations should always wear effective dust masks. If no approved mask is available, a fabric mask improvised from cloth will filter out the larger ash particles which may contribute to throat and eye irritation. Dampening the fabric with water will improve its effectiveness. People

with chronic bronchitis, emphysema, and asthma are advised to stay inside and avoid unnecessary exposure to ash.

- **Eye protection.** In fine-ash environments, wear goggles or corrective eyeglasses instead of contact lenses to protect eyes from irritation.
- **Clean up.** Lightly water down the ash deposits before they are removed by shoveling, being careful not to excessively wet the deposits on roofs, causing excess loading and danger of collapse. Dry brushing can produce very high exposure levels and should be avoided. Hosing uses large quantities of water and may cause water shortages in heavily-populated areas.