



Important Health Information for People in East Harlem

March 12, 2014 Building Collapse and Fire

Update: March 20, 2014

The March 12 building fires and collapses released dust and debris that may have entered nearby buildings and homes. Exposure to soot and dust particles can irritate the eyes, nose and throat and can worsen conditions like asthma or allergies. Water used to put out the fires may have caused water damage to buildings. As a result, steps should be taken prevent mold growth.

How do I get rid of dust, soot and debris?

If your building has extensive damage, water damage and soot/dust, the owner should hire a qualified contractor to repair and clean up damage.

When you move back into your home, take these steps to clean up any minor dust, soot or damage:

- Wear rubber gloves and an N95 disposable dust mask (or similar dust mask). Most home improvement and hardware stores sell N95 dust masks.
- Gently wet down debris and dusty surfaces with water or a soapy water solution in a spray bottle before removing dust/soot.
- Bag debris into regular garbage bags. Tie bags securely when you're done and dispose them along with regular garbage.
- If possible, use a vacuum with a HEPA (high efficiency particulate air) filter to clean up dust. If you don't have this kind of vacuum, use your regular vacuum.
- Wash your hands and face, especially before eating or drinking. After you finish cleaning, change shoes and clothes before entering clean areas of your home.
- Open windows to air out any remaining smoke odors.
- Things made of porous materials (like fabric-covered furniture) may hold smoke odors and may need to be cleaned to remove odors.

How can I prevent mold growth?

The best way to prevent mold in your home is to remove water and moisture sources. Dry out damp areas, and remove humidity from the air by using a dehumidifier (if you have one). Open windows and use fans to help dry and ventilate spaces. Any materials that have become wet or moldy need to be

cleaned and dried, or disposed of. These steps will help stop mold from growing or coming back. For more information, refer to the Health Department's mold fact sheet (see link below) or call 311.

Was asbestos found in the air of the March 12, 2014 East Harlem building explosion and collapse?

The NYC Department of Environmental Protection began testing on March 12 for asbestos. Asbestos was not found in any air sample. Results are available on the DEP website, nyc.gov/dep.

Is the food in my refrigerator safe to eat if my building lost power from the fire?

When frozen food thaws, and refrigerated food warms, bacteria and other organisms grow in food. This can cause serious health problems. Take the following actions if you lost power:

- Throw away any food that could spoil (such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs, dairy, mayonnaise or leftovers) if the food has been out of a cold refrigerator for four hours or more. ***If in doubt, throw it out!*** It's not worth getting sick.
- Since some people in East Harlem haven't had power since Wednesday, the Health Department recommends that all food that could have spoiled be thrown away – whether it was in your refrigerator or freezer.

How do I know if my tap water is safe to drink?

When moving back into a building that lost water due to a power outage, residents should let their water run until it is cold and clear. Unless the NYC Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) or the Health Department issues special alerts, your water is safe to drink.

Can air purifiers reduce smoke residues in my home?

Air purifiers vary widely in their ability to remove air pollutants. Some may improve indoor air quality after a fire. Always follow the product's instructions when using air purifiers. Keep in mind:

- No air purifier can remove all pollutants from the air.
- The most common air purifiers are made to remove only particles. These purifiers will not affect odors caused by the gases in smoke.
- The use of ultraviolet (UV) light in air purifiers does not remove smoke from the air.
- Some air purifiers release ozone gas, which can irritate lungs and worsen asthma. These air purifiers should **not** be used under any conditions.

Should I have the air in my home tested for smoke if there is a fire nearby?

In general, the public health risk for people in communities near a structural fire is low. Sampling the air in your home is unnecessary because the contaminants in the air are expected to be present at very low levels and to be short-term in nature.

What if fears about the March 12th event are seriously affecting my family and work life?

It is not unusual for stressful and tragic events to leave people scared and confused. Stress-related symptoms, such as feeling angry, having headaches or being suspicious and hyper-alert may occur after an event. People who experience these stress-related symptoms for more than a couple of weeks should seek medical help. To find help, contact 1-800-LifeNet (1-800-543 3638), a 24/7 crisis hot-line.

Where can I get more information?

- Pay attention to radio and television for major health alerts.
- For more information on using a **dust mask** or respirator, see the Health Department's fact sheet on dust masks here: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/em/downloads/pdf/sandy/res-health.pdf>
- For more information on **air purifiers**, see the EPA report "Residential Air Cleaning Devices: A Summary of Available Information" here: <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/pubs/residair.html>
- For information on **mold**, visit the Health Department's web page, here: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/environmental/mold.shtml>
- For more on air in NYC, see the NYC Community Air Survey, here: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/environmental/community-air-survey.shtml>

For more information on air quality and health concerns, call 311.

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