



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 7, 11201 Renner Blvd., Lenexa, KS 66219
Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, and Nine Tribal Nations

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June 23, 2020

“You know you have these fires. They’re devastating. They burn up a neighborhood, and you have a similar situation. You’ve got a house just burned down to nothing, and what remains is air conditioners, refrigerators, propane bottles if they didn’t burn. And paints and aerosol cans, and things like that. And then the other thing that we find is that, especially older homes, there’s a lot of things that have asbestos in the homes. Sometimes, these things wouldn’t be a problem normally until you have a fire. An example of that is the tile floors. Vinyl tiles on a floor often contain asbestos if they’re older tiles. But, that asbestos mat is inside of that matrix of vinyl. Kind of rubbery vinyl. And so, it doesn’t become friable, it doesn’t break into little bits and get into the air. So it’s not that big of a threat normally.

But, the problem is if you burn it, that plastic vinyl burns away because it’s like oil based, and it gets consumed, and the ash that’s left over is high in very fine, free-floating asbestos. You see the same thing around windowsills, chimney packings, and things like that. So, these conditions need to be assessed at these homes that are burned down to nothing. So, we’ll send in a forward team of people who are kind of trained-up to see this, to look for these conditions. On-Scene Coordinators are the leaders of those teams, and we’ll go in and try to figure out if anything needs to be done before the demolition crew comes in behind us. Normally, on big California wildfires, it becomes a disaster area, like a nationally declared disaster area. And then FEMA comes in, and money comes out of FEMA for the different Emergency Support Function federal agencies to go in and do their work. We’re under Emergency Support Function 10 for HAZMAT, so we’ll go in and do that kind of assessment and do that cleanup of those hazards before the next group, which is usually the Army Corps of Engineers, who is in charge of debris management, debris removal. We don’t want them to just come in and bulldoze this house down into a big pile if there’s hazardous materials there.”

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