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Volcanic Ash Hazards

Recent activity by the Kilauea Volcano in Hawaii catapults volcanic eruptions to the forefront of the news. Volcanoes impact the earth in many ways, but volcanic ash and dust can create a myriad of problems once they hit the atmosphere. Ash from the 1980 Mt. Saint Helen's eruption rose to a height of 60,000 feet and covered an area of 22,000 square miles. Plummer, ID received one inch of ash from that eruption. Our location alone gives us reason to learn to prepare for and respond to volcanic ash fall.

Volcanic Ash Facts



Kilauea Volcano Image Credit: Mario Tama/Getty Images

- ◆ Volcanic ash is actually small jagged pieces of rocks, minerals, and volcanic glass the size of sand and silt.
- ◆ Ash can irritate eyes and cause respiratory problems in people and animals.
- ◆ Ash can clog or abrade engines, gears, and other forms of machinery. It may also contaminate or clog ventilation, water supplies, and drains.
- ◆ Volcanic ash does not dissolve in water and is mildly corrosive.
- ◆ When wet, volcanic ash conducts electricity and can cause electrical short circuits. Transmission lines, computers, and other electronic devices can be affected. Often the power goes out during or even after an ash fall.

3 Quick Preparedness Steps

1. Store at a minimum three days water and non-perishable food in your home for all the family members including pets. Have a back up method for preparing food if the power is out.
2. Add N-95 rated face masks and goggles to your disaster supply kit to protect against respiratory problems and eye abrasion. Add enough plastic wrap to the kit to wrap the critical electronics in the home.
3. Battery or crank powered radios for communications and flashlights/lanterns for light will be needed. If you are using battery powered units, make sure to keep an ample supply of spare batteries.

A well stocked disaster supply kit has many more items in it than the few mentioned above; for a detailed look at what should be in a kit go to: adacounty.id.gov/accem/Emergency-Preparedness-Guide

Actions to Take During and After an Ash Fall

- ◆ Close all doors, windows, and dampers in the home. Seal drafty windows with tape. Place damp rolled towels at the threshold of exterior doors to prevent ash from blowing in at the bottom of the door.
- ◆ Wear long sleeves and pants when in contact with the ash. Protect your eyes with goggles and your lungs with an N-95 mask. When entering your home from outside, remove ash covered clothing and shoes.
- ◆ Most roofs cannot support more than four inches of wet ash. Keep the roof and household gutter systems as clear as possible. Ash is very slick, be careful on ladders and on the roof.
- ◆ Inside the home dust often using a vacuum and attachments. Dust cloths can become abrasive. Keep sensitive electronics wrapped and unplugged until all ash/dust can be removed.
- ◆ If possible, do not drive in ash as it is harmful to vehicles. If you must drive, do not exceed 35 mph. Change oil, oil filters, and air filters every 50-100 miles in heavy dust; every 500-1000 miles in light dust.

