

Testing your soil after a fire

Cinder & Root · sample guide · checked 1 September 2026

Read this first

This is a sample guide on a demonstration website. It describes how an organization like ours works; it is not health, legal or cleanup advice. What a soil result means for a family is for your county health department and your state's environmental agency.

WHY TEST

Ash and burned material can leave metals such as lead in the top few inches of ground. You cannot see them. A test from a lab is the only way to know what is there.

WHAT YOU NEED

- Gloves, and a clean trowel or spoon
- Clean zip bags or the containers your lab sends
- A marker, and a simple sketch of your yard

SAMPLE

Taking a sample

FOLLOW YOUR LAB FIRST

Every lab has its own instructions. Where ours differ from theirs, follow the lab.

HOW WE TAKE ONE

- Pick one area at a time: the vegetable bed, the play area, the front lawn.
- Take small scoops from five to ten spots across that area, each from the top four inches.
- Mix them in one bag. That is one sample for that area.
- Label the bag with the area and the date, and mark it on your sketch.
- Wash the trowel before the next area.

SAMPLE

Where to send it

Use a lab your state accredits for soil. Your county or state environmental agency lists them. On our free test days we take the cores for you and send them to an outside lab at no cost to you.

WHAT IT COSTS

Commercial tests vary. Ask the lab for the price of the metals you want tested before you send anything.

SAMPLE

When the **results** come back

You will get a sheet with a number for each metal, usually in milligrams per kilogram (mg/kg). Our guide “Reading a lab sheet” explains the columns.

WHO TO ASK

- Your county health department: what the numbers mean for your family.
- Your state environmental agency: the screening levels and what to do next.
- Us: how the site could be cleaned, and whether it could join our program.

SAMPLE