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Containment and Removal of Fire Retardants Settled on Buildings, Contents and Land

By Patrick J. Moffett, REA, CHMM

The discussion about the containment and removal of fire retardant materials is as controversial as the application of fire retardants. There was (and still may be) a federal lawsuit filed against the USFS for the use of chemicals like Phos-Chek. A non-profit organization won a lawsuit in 2006, which found the government was not exempt from abiding by the National Environmental Policy Act and the Endangered Species Act.

The role of a fire retardant is to steer flames and fire away from populated areas and buildings. While building owners praise the “red cloud” sprayed nearby and on their property — and even demand it — the use of fire

retardants increases the possibility for leaving a potent mix of potentially toxic chemicals behind. There is growing opposition to fire retardant use in certain situations. Heated debates flare over how much fire retardant is too much or whether or not it should even be used. Fire retardants are not merely water. Trees, plants, buildings, cars, and equipment are adversely affected by some fire retardants, endangering wildlife including aquatic animals, plants and organisms.

So what does a homeowner or a professional fire damage cleanup restorer do with the residual mess? The answer is — it depends.

- When the fire retardant spray is away from property including lawns, parking and driveways, swimming pools and decks, buildings and equipment; it is best to let nature take her course and use sunlight, UV, temperature, humidity and rain to wash off the chemicals.
- When the fire retardant affects personal property, risk management decisions should be made. The residual composition of some retardants can cause corrosion, pitting, discoloration and other problems.
- Some product manufacturers recommend washing it off with water because their chemicals are water-based. However, a growing discussion by environmental