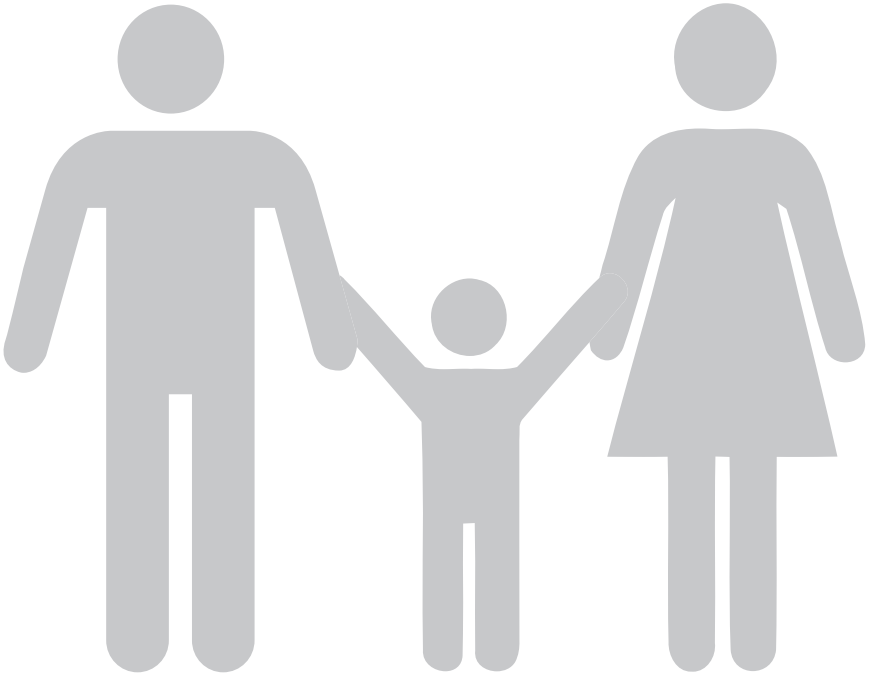


Guide to

WILDFIRE RECOVERY





Quick Checklist

- Do not enter your home until fire officials say it is safe.
- Use caution when entering burned areas as hazards may still exist, including hot spots, which can flare up without warning.
- Avoid damaged or fallen power lines, poles and downed wires.
- Watch for ash pits and mark them for safety—warn family and neighbours to keep clear of the pits also.
- Watch animals closely and keep them under your direct control. Hidden embers and hot spots could burn your pets' paws or hooves.
- Follow public health guidance on safe cleanup of fire ash and safe use of face masks.
- Wet debris down to minimize breathing dust particles.
- Wear leather gloves and heavy soled shoes to protect hands and feet.
- Cleaning products, paint, batteries and damaged fuel containers need to be disposed of properly to avoid risk.

Ensure your food and water are safe.

- Discard any food that has been exposed to heat, smoke or soot.
- Do NOT ever use water that you think may be contaminated to wash dishes, brush teeth, prepare food, wash hands, make ice or make baby formula.

Introduction

Following an evacuation, there are a number of practical and emotional things you can consider when you're ready or allowed to return home.

This guide provides information on what to do after you have been evacuated from your community following a wildfire. It provides tips and suggestions for the next steps in your return journey home.

The government will provide information on when your community will be considered safe. Please do not return to your communities until your local authorities, band leadership or Chief and council have given permission to do so.



**BEFORE
YOU
START**

Anticipate what it will be like

The physical environment:

It helps to think ahead about what the environment will look, feel, and smell like when you return. There may be delays in returning home due to the area being unsafe, and your community may have dramatically changed, including:

- Blackened lifeless landscapes
- Burnt out buildings and vehicles
- Smell of smoke, burnt trees, homes, vehicles
- Areas covered in ash
- Road signs, and familiar landmarks missing
- Spoiled food in fridges and freezers
- Signs painted on remaining houses

Preparing to return to your home and community:

When it is safe to return, think about:

- Are the roads open and safe? Do you know what route to use to get to your home?
- Do you have fuel, food, and water? There may be limited amounts available to you in your community
- Are your cell phones charged? There may be interruptions or lack of electricity in your community
- Who will you inform that you're returning home?
- Do you have a radio, a flashlight and an emergency preparedness kit?
- Do you have appropriate clothing, boots with heavy soles, thick rubber gloves, hat, long pants and long-sleeved shirt?
- If you anticipate clean-up do you have personal protective equipment, including masks? Do you know where to get these items?
- Do you and your returning family members have your tetanus booster and other vaccinations up to date?
- Do you have all medications that you will need?
- Will you take your children and pets on the first visit?

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PREPARING TO RETURN HOME

We know that your home is not just a house and it holds memories and aspirations for the future. Acknowledging your loss and taking time to grieve is an important step.

If you cannot live in your home:

- Do not enter the area where your home is located unless officials say it is safe to do so.
- Use caution if entering the burned area as hazards may still exist.
- Recognize that there may be many tasks associated with relocating and resettling your family. Take small steps.
- Get your family settled – if your home is unlivable, you will need to arrange temporary housing. The government may have this set up. Try to keep the family together.
- Take care of your pets – if possible, take your pets with you and ensure they have plenty of food and water. Ask your vet or SPCA for some options to board your animals, if you cannot take the pets with you.
- Notify people of your temporary address – give your new address to your employer, family/friends, post office, bank, school, credit cards, utility companies, insurance companies, and if applicable, update your information with the Red Cross.

If there is no apparent damage to your home:

- Do not enter your home until officials say it's safe to do so.
- If you are unsure if it is safe, ASK! Reach out to your local authorities as they are there to help you.
- Use caution when entering burned areas as hazards may still exist, including hot spots.
- Work out what you need to do FIRST. Take small steps at a time: check the status of your power, water, gas, phone, and sewer. You may need to call utility services for assistance.
- Once you are feeling settled, reach out to your neighbours. It is important to re-establish relationships and be a helping hand to one another.

Important documents to recover

Be careful: If your documents are located in a safe, do not attempt to open it until the outside is cool to the touch.

ITEM DESTROYED OR MISSING

Animal registration papers

Bank books

Birth certificates – Marriage certificates – Death certificates - Status cards

Bonds (completely destroyed)

Bonds (partially destroyed)

Children's Services and Social Assistance identification cards, medical assistance or social assistance cheques

Immigration documents

Credit cards

Divorce papers

Driver's licences and vehicle registration title cards

Income tax records

Insurance policies

Land titles

Medical records

Military discharge papers

Money (partially or completely destroyed)

Passports

Provincial/Territorial health insurance card

Social Insurance Number (SIN) cards – Canada Pension Plan documents –
Employment Insurance documents

Stocks

Titles to deeds

Wills

WHO TO CONTACT FOR REPLACEMENT

Municipal office

Bank branch

Provincial/Territorial Registrar General or Ministry of Vital Statistics

Write to: Canada Savings Bonds
P.O. Box 2770, Station D
Ottawa, ON K1P 1J7

Include names and addresses that appeared on bonds, approximate date when purchased, and denominations. Gather all pieces and ashes and keep them for further reference.

Gather up remaining pieces and ashes, put them in a package and write a letter explaining what happened. Send to Canada Savings Bond address (above).

Your case worker

Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada

Issuing credit card company

Supreme Court where decree was filed or divorce lawyer

Provincial/Territorial transportation ministry

Revenue Canada

Insurance agent

Local provincial/territorial land title office

Family doctor or specialist

Veterans Affairs Canada

Nearest Bank of Canada branch

Your Consulate General

Provincial/Territorial health ministry

Service Canada

Issuing company or lawyer

City hall or local municipal office

Family lawyer or estate lawyer

Before moving back into your home ensure that the water supply has been inspected and officially declared safe for use, that every room that was affected by the fire has been cleaned, disinfected and dried, that all affected dishes, utensils and glasses have been thoroughly washed and disinfected and that adequate toilet facilities are available.

Ensure your home is secured against further damage. Check for damaged trees or external buildings that may have become unstable. If you rent, the landlord or property manager should do this. If you own the home, you should board up broken windows and smashed doors, and cover holes in walls and in the roof. You can also call a contractor to do this. See the Yellow Pages under “Contractors – General” or “Fire & Water Damage Restoration.”

Here is a list of recommended items that will help you in the recovery process:

Camera or video camera

Notebook and pen to record damage

Buckets, mops and sponges

All-purpose cleaner or unscented detergent

Large containers for soaking bedding and clothing, and lines to hang them to dry

Flashlight

First aid kit

Tools such as hammer, pliers, screwdriver

Trash bags

Protective equipment: a two-strap dust particulate mask with nose clip (N-95), coveralls, leather and rubber gloves and sturdy boots

Drinking Water

Do NOT consume food left in the house or drink water from the tap until you know it is safe. Bring 4 litres of water per day per person - and food that does not require cooking. Appliances may be unsafe to use.

3

INSPECTING YOUR HOME & STARTING TO CLEAN UP

If you are insured, contact your insurance company. Your policy may cover house cleaning by a restoration specialist. As you go through your possessions, keep ruined furniture, appliances, books, etc. for insurance purposes. You can put them outside or in a shed temporarily.

Household items often take several cleanings to rid them of smoke odours, soot and stains. In some cases, they will never come clean or lose their smell. If you can, consult a restoration specialist to help you determine what is worth saving and what isn't.

Hazardous materials

Contact your municipality or provincial ministry to find out how to dispose of hazardous materials such as solvents, garden chemicals and home cleaning products that have been soaked or that show signs of water damage.

Perishable foods, foods packaged in cardboard or plastic, or any foods or medicines directly exposed to heat, smoke, fumes or water should be discarded. Discard all food in glass jars, as there is a high chance that the seal was broken by exposure to heat. Similarly with food in metal cans, the integrity of the can may have been affected by exposure to heat.

Smoke, odours & soot

Try placing small saucers of vinegar or vanilla around the house to absorb odours.

Heating, appliances and utilities

(Please check the Yellow Pages or phonebook to find the professionals listed below.)

Do not use appliances, electrical outlets, switch boxes or fuse-breaker panels until they have been checked by a qualified electrician.

Have your central heating system checked by a qualified technician before use. Replace any parts that have been damaged or affected by smoke.

You may need to consider replacing all your appliances depending on severity of damage. Take direction from the government authorities.

Consult with a professional electrician or with the manufacturer.

Contact the appropriate utility or service company to have your service restored (i.e. electricity, gas, cable, phone, etc.) when you are ready to return home.

Floors and walls

Vacuum all surfaces with vacuums, including carpets and rugs.

Seal off the room you are working in with plastic sheeting to keep soot from travelling throughout the home.

Consult a professional painter for advice on how to clean your walls. You may need to re-paint with a specially formulated paint.

Furniture

Remove residual mud and soil from furniture and dry it off.

If you suspect any mould on any furniture that has been wet, contact a professional for advice. Check the Yellow Pages or phonebook for listings.

Consult a furniture restoration professional to see if any upholstered furniture can be salvaged. Check the Yellow Pages or phonebook for listings.

You may need to replace furniture entirely if it has been severely damaged by fire.

Scrub wooden surfaces (furniture, kitchen cabinets, railings, etc.) with a stiff brush and a cleaning solution such as Murphy's Oil Soap.

Get professional advice for cleaning antiques and fine reproductions.



You will need to provide a list of lost or damaged items as part of your insurance claim. Review your insurance policy so you understand what items to list. If you had a household inventory before the fire, retrieve it for the insurance adjuster. If you didn't, or if it was destroyed, ask your insurance agent for a blank inventory form; it will jog your memory. Record serial numbers of appliances and household equipment, if possible. Note the approximate cost or value of each item. If possible, take close-up photos or video footage of damaged rooms, furnishings and property.

Once the inventory is complete, contact your insurance company for details on how to submit it to them. Keep all receipts related to living expenses and repairs, permits, inspection forms and any other papers in one place. Your insurance company may request them.

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TAKE AN INVENTORY

Notify your bank or mortgage company

You should notify your mortgage company about the fire and to keep them informed about what is being done to restore the property. They may have forms for you to fill out, and they may want to inspect the property.

For more information on cleaning up after a fire, please refer to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's website.

Have your roof inspected.

Take photographs of damage, both of the building and its contents for insurance purposes

Books, photographs and papers

Most photographs can be air-dried, face up. If they were frozen, thaw and then air-dry photos.

To salvage important documents, put them in the freezer immediately. Later, allow them to thaw and lift off each page as it thaws. Consult your lawyer to determine if the actual documents are important to save, or just the information on the documents.

For advice on salvaging books, photographs or paintings damaged by fire, contact the Canadian Conservation Institute toll free at 1-866-998-3721.

Mattresses and pillows

Mattresses and pillows are usually not worth saving. If you must use a mattress temporarily, let it dry in the sun and then cover it with plastic sheeting.



Water

If affected by the fire, use your washer and dryer only once they have been checked by a qualified electrician.

Scrape all heavy dirt from clothes, rinse and wash several times with detergent and dry immediately to prevent mould from forming.

Never use water you think may be contaminated to wash dishes, brush teeth, prepare food, wash hands, make ice, or prepare baby formula.

Medications

Dispose of all medicines, cosmetics and toiletries that have been exposed to smoke or extreme heat. Medications that are required to be refrigerated should be safely disposed of and replaced to ensure they are still effective. Ensure you have enough medication (prescription and over the counter) to sustain for a two week period.

Dispose of the following items if they have been exposed to smoke, soot or heat from the fire.

Contents of the freezer or fridge including all meat and produce (fresh or frozen)

All boxed foods

All bottled drinks and products in jars (the seal may have been damaged by extreme heat)

Cans with large dents or with any external damage

BASIC NEEDS FOOD, WATER AND MEDICINE

You've been through a lot. Don't expect to just take it in stride.

It is normal to experience conflicting emotions as a result of returning home. Allowing yourself to admit your feelings, such as helplessness, confusion, anger and worry, and expressing them to someone you trust will help you to cope. Try to anticipate what conditions you may be confronted with and how you may react. Thinking through this will help you feel more in control of the situation and less distressed.

- Relief returning home – being able to start to get your home, community, and life back in order
- Uncertainty about what it may be like in the coming days, weeks and months
- Distress about the losses you have experienced – your home, personal/ceremonial possessions, garden, maybe even pets; your community
- Relief at what did survive and remain after the fire
- Upset about the changes you have to deal with
- Enthusiasm and motivation to begin to rebuild
- Overwhelmed and worried about how you're going to get through it all – the hard work ahead, and the disruption to your daily life and the impacts on the surrounding community
- Replaying of the frightening moments of the approaching disaster before you left, or the process of evacuating
- Hope for the future

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF AND OTHERS

What you can do:

Identify the feelings and thoughts. Notice them, and label them. Are you feeling anxious feeling of anger or sadness?

Some individuals notice feelings of worry or distress and may experience having a tight chest, gritted teeth, tense jaw, butterflies in their stomach, heart palpitations, sweaty palms, or shortness of breath.

Recognise what these feelings and sensations are by putting them into words and speaking to someone you trust.

The next step is to find ways of managing your feelings. These are some useful techniques that you may find helpful.

If you are feeling anxious or upset, try to:

1. Slow down your breathing.
2. Challenge the negative thoughts and replace them with helpful ones.
3. Only do what you can and take small steps.
4. Try not to take anger out on others.
5. Be patient with yourself and those close to you– it takes time to manage feelings. You and those around you are taking this journey together.

There are practical things that also will help you to manage:

1. Avoid isolation. Individuals who seek out support, involve themselves in their community, and use the services available recover faster and better.
2. Get enough rest. Sleep as much as your body needs for a few days.
3. Stay hydrated, eat nutritiously and regularly.
4. Whenever possible, take time away to do something that you find enjoyable.
5. Get as much realistic physical activity as possible.
6. Accept help from others.
7. Find a support network.
8. Keep a record of your thoughts and feelings.
9. Give someone a hug. Physical touch is important to feel connected.
10. Make plans for the future.



Words of Encouragement...

No one knows your
children as well as you do.

Family is the most important
support network for children.

Getting help early can be
a good idea.



TAKING CARE OF YOUR CHILDREN

Children have many different types of reactions to disaster and evacuation.

They may be coping well. They may become clingy or fearful, have aches and pains, have nightmares, or revert to thumb-sucking and bed-wetting. They may fight more with their siblings. They may try to act brave when they really need reassurance. All these responses are expected.

Here are some things that may be helpful as you help your children to cope:

- Encourage your children to express their feelings, fears, and experiences. This could include conversations, drawing, play or songs.
 - Continue to love and support your child/children encourage them to talk about their feelings, fears, and experiences. Listen to them. Admit that you also feel sad, afraid, worried, but that you will be there and will work it out together.
 - Provide your children age-appropriate but factual information about what happened. When the time is right, discuss fire prevention with them, including what they can do to keep the family safe.
 - Provide reassurance to your children that the family is safe. Repeat this as often as possible!
 - Keep close to them, and hold them.
- Touch provides extra reassurance that someone is there for them. Spend extra time with them at bedtime.
- Be tolerant of regressive behaviour. It is usually temporary.
 - Allow your children to help by giving them jobs to do, even if it slows you down or even if you will have to do the job over again later. Praise them for what they accomplished
 - Return to a normal schedule, but relax rules for a while.
 - Work with family, teachers, childcare providers, babysitters, and others who will need to understand how the fire and evacuation have affected your children.

Special considerations for caregivers:

For people who depend on caregivers, there may be debris on the streets that could prevent caregivers from being able to reach you. This could leave you isolated.

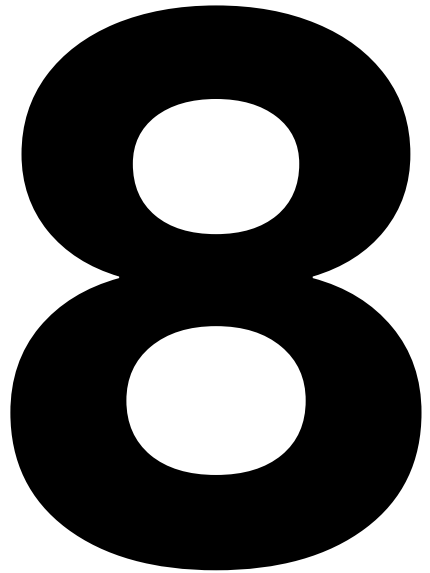
If you have a service animal, the animal also needs time and care to recover. They may be hurt or too frightened to work after a disaster.

Your usual access to health services, such as your family doctor, physiotherapist, home care, and other health supports may be limited.

If you have a condition that requires a reliable electrical supply i.e. home dialysis, home oxygen, CPAP or other assistive devices such as an electric bed or lift, or motorized wheelchair that requires please check to ensure that your devices can operate consistently.

Noisy surroundings, like a shelter, may interfere with how well your hearing aid functions. Also, the vibratory cues you are used to may be disturbed. A noisy environment can be very disorienting for people with visual impairments, as well.

Familiar landmarks you use to help guide you may move or be destroyed, both indoors and out.



SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Your usual ways of getting groceries, medications, and medical supplies may be disrupted. It may take several days before stores reopen, so you may not be able to readily replace even basic items related to your health, including possible disabilities, like hearing aid batteries and prescription medications.
- You may not be able to carry out your daily activities as you did before the disaster.
- You may have a hard time reaching or getting help from police and fire departments, ambulance services, doctors, hospitals, pharmacies, veterinarians, markets, personal assistants, and other home health providers.
- Ensure you have an adequate supply (minimum of two weeks) of any other health supplies you may need, i.e. incontinence products, wound care supplies, barrier creams etc. Access to these products may be limited or certain products not available.
- Public transportation may not be working. Routes and schedules may be changed. Public and private wheelchair transport services or paratransits may not be operating.
- Roads may be damaged or blocked. Road signs may be down. Traffic lights and walking signals used to cross the street may not be working properly, or at all. This can disrupt cues used to cross the street. Travel time may be longer because of detours and added traffic.
- For many people with Alzheimer's or other dementias changes in routine can be extremely upsetting resulting in new or increased challenging behaviors, angry outbursts, increase in wandering frequency, disruption in sleeping, eating and toileting patterns may also occur.
- When you return home it is important to remember that for the person with Alzheimer's and/ or other dementias there may be lingering effects.
- Landmarks may be changed or gone entirely, home may look, feel and smell different. Routines may be new or old routines renewed, both resulting in the potential to disorient. Re-establish a routine as soon as possible, reassurance and distraction when agitated will help to make the person feel safe and comforted.
- Caregivers while feeling relieved to a return home and a return to normal will likely still face some challenging behaviors as they provide care in the "new normal".
- Organizations like the Alzheimer's Society have excellent resources to help and may have support groups in your area to help you in the transition.

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MOVING BEYOND

The period after a disaster can often feel overwhelming, lonely and difficult. Some people find it helpful to:

1. Get back into a routine. It will probably look different from the one you had pre-disaster, but familiar patterns of mealtimes (with familiar food), school or work, and bedtimes are important for adults as well as children.
2. Break tasks into small steps that are manageable and can be accomplished. Work through them one at a time.
3. Think about what you have achieved at the end of each day.

Individuals often find themselves reliving their experience of the disaster and evacuation, thinking about it, trying to put some sense of order into the events, and answering the question of “why?”

It's natural to try to understand what has happened, but it's important to also recognise that many things that occurred were outside of your control.

If you continue to feel overwhelmed, can't shake the feelings of despair or have any of the following signs, seek help through your family doctor, clergy or a community organization. Asking for help is a sign of strength.

- Frequent arguments or short temper
- Increased consumption of alcohol or drugs
- Difficulty sleeping, bad dreams
- Depression
- Panic attacks or general anxiety
- Feelings of intense sadness and hopelessness

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NOTES AND IMPORTANT INFORMATION

THE CANADIAN RED CROSS SOCIETY

Western Canada

100, 1305-11th Avenue SW
Calgary, AB T3C 3P6
(403) 541-6100

Ontario

5700 Cancross Court
Mississauga, Ontario L5R 3E9
(905) 890-1000

Quebec

6, Place du Commerce
Verdun, Quebec H3E 1P4
(514) 362-2930

Atlantic Canada

133 Troop Avenue
Dartmouth, NS B3B 2A7
(902) 423-3680

National Office

170 Metcalfe Street, Suite 300
Ottawa, Ontario K2P 2P2
(613) 740-1900

Acknowledgements

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