



PreparedBC: Re-entering your home after a wildfire

When your local or First Nations government has declared it safe for you to return home, there are steps you can take to make this transition easier and safer, both physically and psychologically.

GETTING THERE

Local authorities may specify a safe route or routes for your return. Follow their directions, including road closures and other signage, and avoid shortcuts.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY

Fear, stress and anxiety are natural reactions to a traumatic event. Eventually, these feelings will diminish and, for most people, completely subside. To help yourself and your loved ones:

- Accept and offer help and comfort; seek counselling if necessary.
- Focus on positive memories and the skills you've used to get through other hard times.
- Be aware of your child's reactions: reassure them and encourage them to express themselves.
- Give yourself and your family permission to grieve and time to heal.
- Get physical activity, but rest as needed, eat well, hydrate and keep a manageable schedule.

RE-ENTERING YOUR HOME

Your home and its surroundings may not look like they did before you left. As you arrive, it's important to obey all signage and understand Damage Assessment Placards.

- Damage Assessment Placards are notices that the local government places on buildings within the damaged area. They tell you whether a structure is suitable for re-entry, access is restricted or unsafe to enter entirely.

Visit BC Housing's website for more information on placards: www.bchousing.org

If you can only enter your home once, remove valuables and take steps to secure your property.

If you're safely able to return for longer:

- Bring supplies like a flashlight, tools, drinking water, gloves, garbage bags and a first aid kit.
- Walk around the perimeter of any structure before entering, noting electrical wiring, any gas smell or debris that could fall.
- Enter with caution and check that the main power breaker is off.
- Only use generators outdoors; do not connect to a household circuit.
- Note sewage and water damage; your septic system or sump pump may not work without power and water may not be potable (that is, may not be safe to consume).
- Do not use your sewage disposal system unless you know it's capable of handling waste.

- If using propane, gas or heating oil, contact suppliers for inspection and service.
- Take pictures, keep track of your expenses and time spent cleaning up, and keep your receipts.

FOOD AND DRINKING WATER SAFETY

Food can be damaged by unsafe temperatures, smoke, ash, soot, fire retardant chemicals, water and loss of power during a fire.

- Discard food that is spoiled, as well as food that has been stored in a refrigerator that has lost power, even if the power has since been restored. ***When in doubt, throw it out.***
- If your freezer has been exposed to fire or has been without power for more than three days, discard the contents.
 - Discard any food that has thawed.
 - It is considered safe to re-freeze partially frozen foods as long it still contains visible ice crystals.
- If you do not need to replace your fridge or freezer, clean, disinfect and deodorize your fridge and freezer once you have discarded the spoiled food.
- Discard foods/items exposed to heat, ash, chemicals, soot, water and smoke including:
 - foods stored in fridges, freezers, cupboards, drawers and containers
 - open foods
 - packaged foods, including paper, cardboard boxes, plastic, cellophane
 - bottles and jars of food with screw top lids or crown/crimp caps
 - single service items/utensils which also includes individually plastic-wrapped items
- Discard damaged, dented or bulging cans.
- Clean and sanitize canned foods/drinks exposed to smoke only.
- Photograph foods that are discarded as the information may be required for insurance purposes. Contact your insurance provider for specific details and requirements.
- Follow current local guidelines on where food waste may be discarded.
- Do not drink tap water unless local officials have assured you that it's safe for drinking. Obtain bottled water, or boil or disinfect tap water with tablets (or chlorine bleach for non-drinking needs).
- If you are on a well or cistern and it has been damaged, assume the water is not safe to drink. Contact your local authority for instructions.

CLEANING UP AFTER A WILDFIRE

Your insurance policy may cover house cleaning by a fire restoration specialist. If you are going to clean your residence yourself:

- Wear gloves and goggles, keep children and pets away, and ventilate the area you're cleaning well.
- Smoke odours can last a long time, and you may need to clean everything several times.
- Vacuum all surfaces, change heating and air conditioning filters, and have ducts cleaned.
- Soot/smoke can be removed from painted walls with trisodium phosphate, but wallpaper may not be salvageable.
- Clean dirt off furniture, removing drawers and scrubbing wooden surfaces; let dry thoroughly.
- Linoleum flooring may require replacement, but wood and carpet can be vacuumed and washed.

RE-ENTERING YOUR HOME AFTER A WILDFIRE

- To remove odours from fridges and freezers, wash with baking soda/water, vinegar or ammonia.
- Locks and hinges should be taken apart, thoroughly cleaned and oiled.
- Dispose of hazardous materials like solvents and garden chemicals if they show signs of damage. Separate hazardous materials from landfill waste and dispose appropriately.

REPLACING DOCUMENTS AND MONEY

- If your documents are in a safe, do not attempt to open it until it is cool to the touch.
- Keep track of lost documents, including birth certificates, passports and tax records.

INSURANCE MATTERS

- Review your policy to understand what items to list, then take an inventory – you'll need to provide a list of lost or damaged items as part of your claim.
- Take photos or videos, noting serial numbers if possible and the approximate cost of each item.
- Keep your inventory with receipts related to living expenses, repairs and inspections.
- Notify your mortgage company and keep them informed about restoration of your property.
- If you have questions about your home insurance, call your insurance representative directly or call the Insurance Bureau of Canada toll-free at 1 844-2-ASK-IBC.

REPAIRING YOUR HOME

- If you can repair and live in your home, look for a reputable contractor to help with restoration; you may get recommendations from friends and neighbours or your insurance adjuster.
- Verify the track record of any roofer or builder, dealing with only licensed contractors. Beware of potential scams.
- Contact your local authority about submitting plans and getting a building permit, as needed.
- Ask for a written estimate and get a copy of the final, signed contract before the job begins
- Pay only by cheque or credit card – not cash; consider a hold back payable post-completion
- Damage to utilities must be repaired under permit and inspected by the appropriate agency.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR HOMEOWNERS WITH LIVESTOCK

- If you live in a First Nations community, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) is able to cover the costs of repairing homes and buildings, as identified in recovery plans submitted by the local First Nations government.
- In general, where private insurance is in place, that coverage comes first. Where there is no insurance, the INAC recovery plan takes effect.

IF your animals have been relocated:

- If you haven't already, contact your local government Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) regarding number and location of relocated livestock.
- Inspect your farm for hazards and damage, secure the site and contact your insurance provider.
- Assess the situation to determine if you have the ability to feed, water, shelter and safely contain your livestock. Take care to avoid hazards.

- Assess the condition and safety of buildings, equipment and other infrastructure; you may require the help of a professional.
- Check on the status of stored fuels and other hazardous materials.
- Evaluate and document damage to equipment, structures and fence lines.
- Animals should not be returned to your farm until the Evacuation Alert is lifted.

IF your animals have been sheltered in place or have been freed:

- Consider all the recommendations above.
- Locate and determine the health and condition of remaining animals, and provide for their food, water and safety needs.
- Determine your capacity to continue to feed, water, shelter and safely contain your remaining livestock.
- Determine any additional feed and water needs and make arrangement to secure resources if necessary (this may require outside help provided by your local government).
- Determine the number of missing animals. Document any loss of livestock, farm buildings, fences or equipment (in writing and with photographs).
- Notify your Local Government EOC of any large numbers of injured or dead animals.

IF only temporary re-entry is permitted and animals have been sheltered in place or freed:

- For your safety, maintain awareness of the hazard(s) in your area and follow any instructions from your local officials.
- Inspect your farm for hazards and damage, taking care to avoid hazards.
- Locate and determine the health and condition of your remaining animals; provide for their food, water and safety needs.
- Determine your ability to continue to feed, water, shelter and safely contain remaining livestock.
- Determine whether you need to relocate or free animals.
- Note the number of dead or missing animals; if there are large numbers of injured or dead animals, notify your local government EOC.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Emergency Management BC: www.gov.bc.ca/emergency-preparedness-response-recovery

PreparedBC: www.gov.bc.ca/PreparedBC

BC Wildfire Service: www.BCwildfire.ca

Ministry of Health: www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health

Ministry of Agriculture: www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/agriculture-seafood/farm-management/emergency-preparedness

BC Housing: www.bchousing.org

Insurance Bureau of Canada: www.ibc.ca