

What to Do Before Returning Home After a Wildfire

Check with the fire department to make sure your home is safe to enter. Do not go past colored tape that was placed over doors or windows to mark damaged areas, downed power lines or other hazards unless local authorities advise that it is safe to do so. If you have children, leave them with a relative or friend while you conduct your first inspection of your home after the fire. The site may be unsafe for children and may frighten them.

Checking for Damage

- ✓ Check the outside of your home before you enter. Look for loose power lines, broken or damaged gas lines, foundation cracks or other damage. See if porch roofs and overhangs still have all their supports. If you see damage on the outside, it could indicate that the inside of your home is seriously unsafe. Ask a building inspector or licensed contractor to check the structure before you enter.
- ✓ If power is out, use a flashlight to inspect for damage and for as long as the power remains out. Do not use any open flame, including candles, to inspect for damage or serve as alternate lighting.
- ✓ If there is no significant visible outside damage, then check inside. Carefully open the door. If it is jammed, do not force it open. It may be providing support to the structure of your home. If you force open the door, it may cause parts of your home to collapse or become more damaged. Find another way to enter your home. Those who do enter your damaged home should wear long pants, a long-sleeved shirt, closed-toed rubber-soled shoes or boots and work gloves. Depending on the situation dust masks, safety glasses (or goggles) and/or a hard hat and other safety equipment may be needed. Many people are injured after disasters during clean-up
- ✓ Smell or sniff for gas. If you detect the odor of natural or propane gas, or hear a hissing noise, leave the property immediately. Call the fire department using a cellular telephone or a neighbor's phone. Do not attempt to turn on gas lines that have been damaged or turned off. This must be done by your utility company or propane provider.
- ✓ Throughout your first day back, and beyond, check for smoke and embers around and throughout the home, including the attic.
- ✓ Beware of animals, such as rodents, snakes, spiders and insects that may have sought refuge in your home.
- ✓ If it is dry out, open windows and doors to ventilate and dry your home.
- ✓ Make temporary repairs such as covering holes, bracing walls, and removing debris. Save all receipts.

Food Safety

- ✓ Throw away food, beverages and medicine exposed to heat, smoke or soot. Food that was in the freezer can be used if it still has ice crystals on it. If not, discard it.

Smoke Odor

- ✓ There are some products available for reducing odors in fabrics. Any product that is not clearly described as suitable for use on personal clothing or fabrics that come in contact with skin should never be used for the removal of smoke odors from clothing.

Financial Recovery

- ✓ Contact your insurance agent, broker or insurance company as soon as you can to report how, when and where the damage occurred. Provide a general description of the damage.
- ✓ Prepare a list of damaged or lost items and provide receipts if possible. Consider photographing or videotaping the damage where it occurred for further documentation to support your claim.
- ✓ If possible, keep damaged items or portions of those items until the claims adjuster has visited your home. Do not throw away anything you plan to claim without discussing it with your adjuster first.
- ✓ Keep receipts for all additional expenses that you may incur such as lodging, repairs or other supplies.
- ✓ Make copies of all documents and pictures given to your claims adjuster or insurance company. Besides insurance, there are many questions related to taxes. Your local Red Cross is an excellent resource for help with financial recovery. You can visit them at www.redcross.org or call your local chapter.

Vital Records Replacement

Driver's License	Department of Motor Vehicles
Government Issued ID	Contact the issuing authority
Insurance policies	Your insurance agent or company
Passports	State Department—Passport Services, 1-877-487-2778
Credit cards	The issuing companies as soon as possible
MasterCard	Contact issuing financial institution
VISA	Contact issuing financial institution
American Express	1-800-528-4800
Discover	1-800-discover (1-800-347-2683), TDD/TTY 1-800-347-7449
Titles to deeds	Records department of the area in which the property is located
Stocks and bonds	Issuing company or your broker
Wills	Your attorney
Income tax record	The IRS center where filed, your accountant or 1-800-829-1040
Citizenship papers	Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, 1-800-375-5283
Mortgage papers	Lending institution
Birth, death & marriage certificates	Bureau of Records in the appropriate state and/or county
Social Security or Medicare cards	Local office, 1-800-772-1213 or TDD/TTY 1-800-325-0778

Military discharge
800-829-4833

Department of Veterans Affairs, papers 1-800-827-1000 or TDD/TTY 1-

Make copies of important documents, such as birth and marriage certificates and insurance policies, and store these in a safe place.

Rebuilding

- ✓ Make sure that the contractor rebuilding your home is licensed and obtains a building permit. The contractor must follow current building, fire and electrical codes for your area. Ask a professional about having automatic residential fire sprinklers installed during the reconstruction process.
- ✓ Make sure to update your family's disaster plan. The American Red Cross encourages taking five key disaster preparedness steps: make a plan, build a kit, get trained, volunteer and give blood. For more information about preparedness, ask your local Red Cross chapter.
- ✓ Make sure that smoke alarms are installed according to your local fire protection codes.