

Returning to Your Home

Your home may be impacted by smoke, soot and ash, chemicals, structural damage and water damage. This information is a collection of health and safety considerations during initial work to restore your home. This document is intended to be broad-serving and not all of the information may apply to your situation.

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Contact Information

Alberta Health Services, Environmental
Public Health, South Zone

Lethbridge Office

Call: (403) 388-6689

Email:

southzone.environmentalhealth@ahs.ca

Health Link: Call 811

Protect yourself and your family

1. Re-enter areas burned by wildfire safely

Do not re-enter any areas that were heavily damaged or destroyed by the wildfire until the area has been cleared by the local fire authority.

Once you are able to enter burned out areas safely, be very careful. Take basic precautions and be aware of hazards to your health and safety.

If you or your family becomes injured by fire debris, call Health Link at 811, consult your family physician or the local emergency department. You may need medical attention. Even if a dirty wound or puncture injury does not look severe, it could put you at risk for an infection or for tetanus if your immunization is not up to date.

What hazards should I watch for?

- Slip, trip and fall hazards from unstable structures, open pits or wet and slippery surfaces.
- Sharp objects such as nails, metal, concrete or wood debris.
- Ash, soot and demolition dust.
- Hazardous materials such as kitchen and bathroom cleaning products, paint, batteries, and fuel containers which have been partially damaged or destroyed.
- Confined or poorly ventilated areas where carbon monoxide may be present from the operation of pumps, generators, or pressure washers. **Be careful entering tight spaces.**
- Pesticides or herbicide containers potentially damaged or destroyed.
- Propane cylinders for heating or from BBQ.

What personal protective equipment (PPE) should I use to enter burned out areas?

Use PPE when entering your home. In particular, people with asthma or respiratory conditions should only spend short periods of time in these areas and wear respiratory protection.

Breathing protection:

- Use N95 rated masks to help filter out and reduce exposure to fine dust particles such as ash, soot, and other nuisance-type particles. A mask rated N95, when properly fitted (see next section below) will be more effective than a dust mask or surgical mask in blocking particles from ash.
- Look for “NIOSH 95” on the package. N95 means the mask blocks about 95 percent of particles that are 0.3 microns in size or larger.
- Purchase N95 masks at hardware, safety/construction supply businesses and home improvement centres.

- Masks can add physical stress to a person by making it harder to breathe. Individuals who have any doubts concerning their ability to wear a mask should consult with their personal physician.
- If you cannot locate N95 masks, a well-fitting dust mask may provide some protection during cleanup. Many ash particles are larger than those found in smoke, and a dust mask can significantly reduce the amount of particles inhaled.

How to Self-Fit N95 Masks

- Always read and follow the manufacturer's directions when using a mask.
- The mask must cover both the nose and mouth to keep you from breathing in dust and ash.
- If the mask does not have a snug fit, it will not work properly. Correct fit of the respirator requires contact with smooth skin. Masks will not work properly for people with beards or facial hair.
- Always use both straps on the respirator to hold it in place to keep air from leaking around the respirator.
- Do a user seal check, including both positive and negative pressure checks, to verify that you have correctly put on the respirator and adjusted it to fit properly.
 - Negative pressure check - Place both hands completely over the respirator and inhale sharply. Be careful not to disturb the position of the respirator. The respirator should pull into your face. If air leaks around your face or eyes, adjust the nosepiece and straps and repeat the positive pressure check.
 - Positive pressure check - Put your hands over the respirator and breathe out sharply. If your respirator has an exhalation valve be sure to cover the exhalation valve when you exhale. No air should leak out of the respirator if the respirator fits properly. If air leaks out, re-adjust the nosepiece and straps and repeat the negative pressure check

Protective clothing, gloves and boots:

- Select “head-to-toe” protection based upon the situation and work to be done. Consider durability, including cut, puncture, abrasion and slip resistance.
- At minimum, wear long sleeve shirts, long pants, or coveralls, leather gloves and boots with thick soles to prevent punctures from sharp objects.

Eye, face and head protection:

- Wear safety glasses or goggles which provide wrap-around protection. Regular sunglasses are not sufficient protection.
- Protective helmets or hard-hats are recommended for clean-up of areas where there is a risk of falling debris due to structural damage to the home.

Hearing protection:

- Ear plugs or safety ear muffs should be used when operating heavy machinery or power tools.

If you would like more information about the health risks from wildfire smoke, please read [Wildfire Smoke and Your Health](#) available at ahs.ca/epwildfire.

2. Re-enter your home safely

Return to your home only once your local authorities have said it's safe to do so.

Do not enter your home if:

- There is any danger of a structural failure or collapse. Check for any visible structural damage to your home that was caused by this fire.
 - Roofs and floors may be damaged and subject to collapse.
 - The foundation of your home and any brick or cement fireplace chimneys can be severely damaged by the heat from this fire.
 - The concrete foundation of your home may be cracked and leaning or looking like it will actually fall down. It is a very unsafe place for you to be trying to retrieve any items or even to climb down to try to see what damage may have happened. Take all appropriate precautions to protect yourself and family.
- You detect or suspect any source of heat or smoke. Call 911.

Use these tips to protect yourself and property once in your home:

- Wear the appropriate PPE including masks, gloves and boots.
- Try to return to your property during daylight hours.
- Enter your home with extreme caution. Use flashlights. Turn the flashlights on before you enter your home. Don't use any existing electrical light switches to avoid creating any sparks that could cause a secondary fire or explosion if there is a gas leak somewhere in your home.
- Never try to turn utilities back on until they have been checked first by your local utility provider and they have told you it is safe to do so. It is possible that your municipality and utility service providers have had to turn off the utilities. More information may be available from your municipality.
- Do not try to use any electrical appliances or power in your home or garage that may have come in contact with fire, water, or fire retardant until they have been checked and cleared for use by a qualified electrician.
- Turn off all of the valves on a propane tank system and leave valves closed until the supplier inspects your system.
- Visually check the stability of the trees around your property. Look for damage on the tree trunk or for visible damage of burned tree roots. Any trees that have been damaged by fire may soon become another hazard. They will need to be cut down and removed.
- Avoid contact with damaged or fallen power lines and power poles. There may be hidden electrical hazards.
- Watch your pets or other domestic animals closely and keep them under your direct control at all times.
- Wet down any remaining fire debris to minimize health impacts to you and your family from breathing soot and ash particles left by the aftermath of this fire. **Do not** wash the fire debris into the street.

- Impacted sites will likely smell very smoky for a number of days, and there may be soot and ash, as well as fire debris all around your home and yard.
- If you or any of your family members have breathing difficulties or asthma, take all appropriate precautions to protect yourself.
 - Call Health Link at 811 or consult your family physician for any required medications or extra precautions you may need at this time.
 - Lingering smoke and fire ash at your home and yard can temporarily worsen your personal respiratory issues.
 - Further information on [wildfire smoke and your health](#) is available here: ahs.ca/epwildfire.

3. Be careful when near fire retardants and fire residues

- Fire retardant contains ammonia which can
 - sting eyes, cuts, scratches or sunburnt skin
 - irritate intact skin
 - cause coughing/wheezing
 - cause gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea if ingested.
- Soot and ash can cause symptoms including:
 - eye and skin irritation
 - respiratory issues

These symptoms may be significant depending on the type of soot/ash, amount of exposure, and underlying respiratory conditions.

- Smoke can irritate the skin, nose, throat, lungs and eyes and can cause coughing and wheezing. For more information on health effects from wildfire smoke, please see [Wildfire Smoke and Your Health](#).
- Flush your eyes thoroughly with water and/or skin thoroughly with water and a gentle soap solution if contact with fire retardant, soot, ash or smoke.
- If you have respiratory symptoms such as coughing, move away from the area, take any prescription inhalers as directed, and if you are having trouble breathing, seek medical attention promptly.

Fire retardants and your pets

- Thoroughly shampoo any pets that have been exposed to smoke, soot, ash or fire retardants.
- Absorb any puddles generated from shampooing with soil/sand.
- Ensure animals do not ingest water from puddles containing fire retardants or fire residue.
- If your pet appears to be ill from ingesting fire retardants or fire residue, take them to a veterinarian.

4. Review your insurance information or other options

If you are insured:

- Contact your insurance company/ broker as soon as possible. The sooner the insurance company is notified, the quicker your insurance claim can be processed.
- Take plenty of pictures of the damage to your home and property. This will help with your insurance claim.
- Work with your insurance company agent to find out what is covered, what is not covered and what may be subject to further discussion.
- Work with your insurance company and their accredited fire restoration companies to try to restore or rebuild your home.
- Try to create an inventory of household items, both inside and outside the buildings, which have been impacted by fire. Photograph or videotape the damage as much as possible. Do not throw away any damaged goods until after the inventory is made by the insurance assessor.

If you are not insured:

Check with your local, private service organizations to see what help you may be eligible for:

- Canadian Red Cross
- Salvation Army
- Local religious organizations
- Provincial or municipal emergency social services
- Non-profit crisis centres
- Local emergency social services, if available

If your house has a mortgage, call the bank or company that holds this mortgage to let them know as soon as possible.

Restoration Contractors

- As much as possible, work with and through your insurance company. They will know reputable restoration contractors that can help you and that know the proper standards to follow.
- If you decide to choose your own restoration contractor, check their references and certifications.
- If anyone in your family is sensitive to chemicals or mold, you need to let the restoration contractor know that so that they can take all necessary precautions.

- If there are questions or issues arising, contact the Service Alberta Consumer Contact Centre (toll free number is 1 877 427 4088). They can help provide you with more information about various consumer issues.

Use water safely

1. Flushing Your Water System Before You Use It

Prior to using your water system, it is recommended that you flush your water system to remove all stagnant water from the water lines. Follow this procedure even if the boil water advisory is active upon your return home. Repeat flushing once the boil water advisory has been lifted.

- Run all cold water taps for at least 5 minutes before you use them
- Run all hot water taps for at least 5 minutes before you use them (even if the water is not hot).

2. Using Water Safely in Your Home During a Boil Water Advisory

Your home may be under a Boil Water Advisory. The following information explains how to use the water safely for you and your family.

What is a Boil Water Advisory?

A Boil Water Advisory is issued when harmful germs (e.g., E. coli bacteria, Giardia parasite) may be in a drinking water supply. Drinking water contaminated with these germs can make people and animals very sick. Boiling will kill the germs and make the water safe to drink.

When a Boil Water Advisory has been issued, how do I use water?

When a Boil Water Advisory has been issued, don't use the water to:

- Drink, make juice, brush teeth
- Cook, make ice, fill a wading pool
- Make baby formula, wash fruits and vegetables, give to your pet

While a Boil Water Advisory is in effect, use boiled water, bottled water, or water from another safe public supply not affected by the advisory. Throw away any ice in your freezer made with the water and sanitize the ice cube trays (see below). Make ice with boiled water that's been cooled.

What if I have a weak immune system?

If you have a weak immune system (immunocompromised), ask your doctor what to do while a Boil Water Advisory is in effect. You might need to use boiled or bottled water to drink and cook with all the time.

What's the right way to boil water?

You need to boil tap water before it is safe to drink, use, or store. To do this:

1. Fill a pot or kettle with tap water and heat it on the stove until it reaches a full boil. You can also use an electric kettle to do this.
2. Bring water to a rolling boil for at least one minute.
3. Turn off the heat and let the water cool. Once cool, put the water in a clean, disinfected container.

Only boil as much water as you can safely lift without spilling. Put the pot on the back burner. Be careful not to burn yourself or your child.

Can I use bottled water or buy water from self-serve water dispensers?

Sometimes you can use bottled water, but it depends on when and how the water was bottled. Bottling plants and/or water dispensers that use local water must treat the water to remove harmful germs. Check with an Environmental Public Health Office in your area about bottled water brands or water dispensers that have been treated so the water is safe. You can also use water bottled from another public water supply not affected by the advisory.

Is the water safe to use in water play areas?

No. The water is not safe to use in water play areas because there's a risk of people swallowing it and getting sick.

Are there ways to make water safe for other uses?

Water can be made safe from harmful germs for other uses:

- By adding chemicals (e.g., bleach). This water isn't safe to drink, but you can use it for cleaning dishes or areas in your kitchen (e.g., countertops).
- With heat.

Further information on using disinfectants to make water safe is available here:

<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Alberta/Pages/Using-disinfectants-to-make-drinking-water-safe-when-you-cant-boil-it.aspx>

Personal Hygiene

Can I use the water to wash my hands?

While a Boil Water Advisory is in effect, you can use the water to wash your hands. Wash your hands with tap water and soap, making sure to lather for at least 20 seconds. Rinse your hands well with running water and dry

them with a paper towel. After you dry your hands, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with more than 60% alcohol.

Can I take a bath or shower?

Healthy adults can take a bath or shower while a Boil Water Advisory is in effect. Don't swallow any water. An older child can take a shower with a hand-held showerhead, but don't spray any water near the face. Give your baby or young child a sponge bath to make sure he or she doesn't swallow water.

If you have an open wound, cut, blister, or a recent wound from surgery, use boiled or bottled water so you don't get an infection.

Can I brush my teeth?

To brush your teeth while a Boil Water Advisory is in effect, use boiled water that's been cooled, bottled water, or water from another safe source.

Can I wash my laundry?

While a Boil Water Advisory is in effect, you can continue to do your laundry as you normally would.

Cooking and Cleaning

If I have a water filtration device, is the water safe to drink or cook with?

If you have a water filtration device, do not use the water while a Boil Water Advisory is in effect. Many filtration devices don't remove harmful germs.

Can I drink coffee made with untreated water?

While a Boil Water Advisory is in effect, you can use your coffee maker if it heats water to a minimum of 70 °C. Most germs are killed at this temperature. Test the coffee temperature with a thermometer. Let the coffee sit in the pot for at least five minutes before you drink it. If your coffee maker doesn't heat the water to at least 70 °C, use bottled or boiled water to make coffee.

Can I wash dishes by hand?

While a Boil Water Advisory is in effect, wash and rinse dishes with hot water as you normally would. After dishes have been rinsed, they will need to be sanitized to reduce germs to a safe level. To do this, soak your dishes for at least two minutes in a bleach solution. To make a bleach solution, add 10 mL (2 tsp.) of liquid, unscented bleach (5.25% sodium hypochlorite) to 5 litres (20 cups) of warm water. Let the dishes air dry completely.

Can I use my dishwasher?

You can use your dishwasher if it works well and has a hot temperature setting or sanitizer cycle.

If your dishwasher doesn't have a hot temperature setting:

1. Stop the dishwasher at the rinse cycle.
2. Add 20 mL (4 tsp.) of liquid, unscented bleach (5.25% sodium hypochlorite).
3. Restart the dishwasher.
4. Let the dishes dry completely on the heated dry cycle.

How do I sanitize my countertop, cutting board, or other kitchen surfaces?

Wash kitchen surfaces with soap or rinse and sanitize with a bleach solution. Make a new bleach solution every day so it works well to kill germs. You need to do this because bleach breaks down quickly once it's mixed with water.

To make a bleach solution, add 5 mL (1 tsp.) of liquid, unscented bleach (5.25% sodium hypochlorite) to 1 litre of room temperature water (must have been boiled, bottled, or hauled). Spray or pour the solution on surfaces that food will touch and let it sit for at least 2 minutes. Don't use vinegar to sanitize because it doesn't kill germs.

2. Storing water during a boil water advisory

You may need to store water for use while a Boil Water Advisory is in effect. The information below provides on storing water safely.

What types of containers can I use to store water?

Store boiled water in clean, disinfected, plastic, food-grade bottles or containers. Make sure they're airtight, sturdy, and won't break easily. You can buy containers at department or camping supply stores, or use clean, disinfected 2-litre plastic pop bottles with tight-fitting screw caps to store water.

If you're storing a lot of water (e.g., in 10-litre or 18-litre water containers), make sure everyone in the home can lift the full containers. One litre of water weighs about 1 kg (2.2 lbs).

What types of containers can't be used to store water?

Don't store water in:

- Containers that were used to hold chemicals (e.g., bleach, laundry detergent).
- Milk or juice containers made of plastic or cardboard.

How do I clean and disinfect water storage containers?

1. Wash out the storage containers with hot, soapy tap water and rinse them.
2. Mix 5 mL (1 tsp) of unscented, liquid household chlorine bleach (5.25%) with 1 litre of safe water (boiled or bottled water). Don't use bleach that is scented, colour-safe, or with added cleansers.
3. Pour the bleach and water mixture into the container. Close the container and shake it well for 30 seconds.
4. Pour out the mixture and rinse the container with safe water.

How much water do I need to store?

Store at least a three-day supply of five litres of water per day for each person or pet in the home. This would mean at least 15 litres of stored water for each person or pet. If you can, store a two-week supply, which would be about 70 litres per person or pet.

How do I store water?

Store water in a cool, dark place. Put the containers in dark, plastic bags to keep the light out.

You can store treated water in well-sealed containers for 6 months. Write the fill date on the containers so you know how long they are safe to use.

Commercially-bottled water is safe to keep for one year if it's in the original, sealed container. Use all the water in one bottle before you open another one. Check the expiry date before you use bottled water.

3. What to do after the Boil Water Advisory is lifted

Once the Boil Water Advisory is no longer in effect, you need to flush, clean, and sanitize:

- Water pipes
- Water treatment devices
- Plumbed appliances
- Water storage facilities

Before you use water in your home:

- Remove all aerator or screen devices from faucets.
- Run hot and cold water faucets for at least five minutes before you use them.
- If you live in an apartment or condominium, run all faucets for at least five minutes, until the water is clear and any air in the plumbing has been released.
- Rinse out any sediment or debris from the aerator or screen devices and put them back on the faucet.
- Flush, clean, and sanitize appliances with water line connections (e.g., fridges with water and ice dispensers) following manufacturer's instructions.
- Disinfect water filtration devices following manufacturer's instructions.

- Run your water softener through a regeneration cycle following manufacturer's instructions.
- Replace filters on any tap water filtration devices, and flush the fixture according to the manufacturer's directions
- Hot water heaters and hot water heating systems may require that some water be drained to get rid of any sediment.
- If your hot water heater was set below 45 °C, drain and refill the tank.

4. What to do with your private well or cistern:

If you have a well or cistern, it may be physically damaged and your water supply may be contaminated by harmful germs (bacteria) due to a loss of pressure. Conduct a physical inspection of your well or cistern and test your water for bacteria before you begin using it.

Don't drink untreated water until you get your test results back. Use the water as if a Boil Water Advisory is in effect. . More information is available in Section 2 above.

Check for damage in the water system components, including:

- Power supply
- Above-ground piping or the cistern
- Water treatment equipment
- Well cap or cistern lid

If you see any damage, contact the appropriate licensed contractor to repair the damage.

Test your water supply:

Contact Environmental Public Health, South Zone at 403-388-6689 to find out where to pick up water sample bottles and drop off water samples.

Information on how to collect a water sample is available at:

<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/alberta/pages/Bacteria-Testing.aspx>

Information on how to understand your Drinking Water Bacteria Testing Results is available at:

<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/alberta/pages/Understanding-drinking-water-bacteria-testing-results.aspx>

If your water supply is contaminated:

If your water supply is contaminated, you will need to shock chlorinate your well and/or clean and disinfect your cistern.

Information on shock chlorinating your well is available at: <http://aep.alberta.ca/water/education-guidelines/working-well/documents/Issue3-ShockChlorinatingWell-Mar2017.pdf>

Information on Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Cistern is available at:

<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Alberta/Pages/How-to-clean-and-disinfect-a-cistern.aspx>

Restore your home

1. Discard items impacted by smoke, heat, ash and chemicals

Food, medicines, cleaners, cosmetics and other toiletries can be damaged by heat, smoke and lingering chemical residues.

There will be items that, after inspection of your fire-damaged home, need to be properly disposed of. Before disposing items, make sure that you inventory those items as part of your fire insurance claim.

Foods

- Take stock of the foods in your home that you are able to see.
- For insurance purposes, take plenty of photos and write down an inventory of the contents of your fridge(s) and freezer(s).
- Your fridge and freezer may have been without power for some time now and could smell.
- Check the food in your home and **discard**:
 - Food stored in the refrigerators, coolers and freezers IF the temperature was greater than 4°C **at any time**. Please note that the temperature may have exceeded 4°C when the power was disrupted and then returned to 4°C.
 - Any food that has spoiled, even if the cooler remained at 4°C at all times.
 - Open foods.
 - Fire or smoke damaged foods like dry goods (i.e. flour, sugar, spices, etc.) even if the package isn't open.
 - Unrefrigerated raw vegetables or fruits.
 - Foods that were stored in porous containers (e.g. cardboard, foam containers, etc).
 - Canned food where the can is bulging, rusted or dented.
 - Jarred foods, as the heat from the fire likely compromised the safety seal.

Be safe. If in doubt, throw it out.

- Clean and disinfect all canned foods before opening to make sure that the contents aren't contaminated.
- Contact your insurance company to see if you need to replace your fridge or freezer, or if you have coverage for a new fridge or freezer. Follow current local guidelines for discarding fridges and freezers, if required.

- If you are keeping your fridge or freezer, clean, disinfect, and deodorize your fridge and freezer once you have discarded the spoiled food. To do this:
 1. First unplug the fridge and freezer.
 2. Rinse or blow out the coils and compressors on the fridge and freezer.
 3. To clean the inside, use soap and water and then rinse with clean water.
 4. Sanitize the inside with a bleach/water mixture made by mixing 1 teaspoon of ordinary household bleach for every 4 cups of water.
 5. Leave the doors of the fridge and freezer open to help them dry out.
 6. Once the appliance is dry, reconnect the power.
 7. Wait until the inside temperature of your fridge has reached 4C before restocking it with food.
 8. Wait until your freezer temperature is at -18C before restocking it with food.

Medications and Toiletries

- For insurance purposes, take plenty of photos and write down an inventory of the contents of your medicine cabinets and cupboards.
- Discard any medicine, cosmetics and toiletries exposed to smoke or high temperatures, even if the package isn't opened.
- Follow current local guidelines on where medicines and other chemicals may be discarded.

2. Clean up smoke damage and soot

There may be smoke damage and soot in your home after the fire. Contact your insurance company and fire restoration company as soon as possible. The fire restoration contractor will be able to give you more information about:

- How to prevent further damage,
- Help you determine which things can or cannot be properly cleaned,
- Help to thoroughly clean and deodorize your home before you move back in.

As with hiring any service, be clear ahead of time whether it is you or your insurance company that will pay, get estimates in writing, and get a referral from your insurance company or other customer if possible.

If you don't hire a fire restoration company, you can do things like:

- Use PPE as appropriate, such as masks, rubber gloves, rubber boots, long sleeved shirt and pants.
- Contact the local authority to determine where and how hazardous materials, including ash, should be disposed.

Exterior

- Use a hose, sprayer or pressure washer on the exterior of your home, driveways, walkways, vehicles, patios, decks and outdoor furniture. Rinse off air intakes and air conditioners. Be sure NOT to use air hoses or leaf blowers — you do not want to drive more contaminants into your house.
- **Be careful when using pumps, pressure washers or generators in enclosed spaces.** Carbon monoxide may be present in confined or poorly ventilated areas where from the operation of pumps, generators, or pressure washers.
- Attic insulation can retain smoke odours, and you may wish to consider replacing it.
- If you have a private septic system, check the area around your system for damage, like sewage leaks. Contact a sewage disposal professional if you find damage to your septic system.

Air Circulation

- Get the air moving inside your house by using a fan and open your windows, providing there is no smoke or air quality advisory for your neighbourhood.

Note: When demolition activities are more likely to produce airborne ash:

- Stay indoors
 - Close all external doors and windows
 - Turn off the ventilation as much as possible for air conditioners and furnaces.
- Replace your furnace filter.
 - The use of humidifiers can reduce how much ash becomes air-borne.
 - Have a professional do a cleaning on your ducts and air conditioning system.
 - Ozone generators do not function as “air cleaners” despite advertising claims.

Interior Surfaces

- Wash all interior surfaces with mild detergent or appropriate cleaning solution and rinse thoroughly. Include the inside of closets, cupboards, drawers and other locations if there is any ash, dust or the odour of fire.
- Wash interior of windows thoroughly.
- Wet wiping or mopping is safer and more effective than dry or dust mopping. Change the water if it gets dirty and dispose of the solution out of the house.
- Only vacuum with a unit which has a “HEPA” filter which can catch ash particles. Using unfiltered vacuums will just move the ash around the house. Change your HEPA filter frequently.
- Ash left in place is reduced into smaller particles and becomes harder to remove from carpets and surfaces.
- Wash and clean all ash-contaminated household items with mild detergent, changing the water frequently.

Fabric, carpets and clothing

- Soot is oily and can stain carpets, curtains and soft furnishing. It must be removed before you try to clean or deodorize those items.
- Steam clean carpets, drapes, curtains and furniture, changing the water frequently.
- Launder or dry clean all affected clothing and other materials. You may have to run numerous rinse cycles to extract all materials. Consider doing this laundering off-site using a machine tagged for heavy contaminants at a laundromat. These are usually marked as “oilers.”

Electronics

- It is recommended that you carry all electronic equipment outside and “blow out” the components with an air hose, before using. Ash can cause static charges.
- Consider unplugging, rolling out and either blowing out or rinsing the coils and compressors on your refrigerators and freezers (they must dry completely before repowering).

3. Repair water damage

If your home was damaged by water, you will need to get rid of all excess water to prevent potential for mold growth.

- Before starting any work, ensure proper PPE is worn, such as a mask and rubber gloves.
- To help prevent mold growth, any water-damaged or water-stained surfaces and appliances should be checked for damage. Clean the affected areas using warm water and soap first. Then disinfect the surfaces with a 1:10 parts household bleach to water solution (1 tsp bleach in 750 ml of water or 1 capful bleach in 1 gallon of water).
- Dry all wet items as soon as possible.
- Wet or waterlogged carpeting should be dried as quickly as possible and any underlay should be removed. Steam cleaning carpets with a disinfectant should be adequate.
- You may need to use a dehumidifier to help to remove excess moisture from the air inside your home.
- Let your insurance company and restoration contractor know as soon as possible if you find any visible mold growth or smell mold inside your home.

If you discover a small amount of mold (typically under 10 square feet), and you wish to complete the work yourself, more information is available here: <https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Alberta/AlbertaDocuments/mould-remediation-private-homes.pdf>

4. Clean your yards and outdoor play areas

Your yard and surrounding areas may be impacted by fire ash and soot. These materials will contain polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH,) as well as heavy metals. A fire restoration contractor will be able to provide clean-up services.

If you decide to manage this yourself:

- Use PPE as appropriate, such as masks, rubber gloves, rubber boots, long sleeved shirt and pants.
- Wet down remaining fire debris. **Do not** wash the fire debris into the street.
- Scrape up fire ash and soot remaining on your property as much as possible, place it in plastic bags or other containers that will prevent it from being disturbed, and take it to a landfill.
 - If your home/property was totally destroyed by fire then the restoration company will look after this for you as they begin the demolition and recovery process.
- If you choose to remediate lawns, you can re-sod or reseed grassy areas.
- Consider adding new, clean soil to gardens if you suspect or know the area was impacted.
- For children's play areas and equipment, clear away any debris and ensure water that may have been used in the fire is gone.
- If there is fire or structural damage to play equipment, consider blocking access to the area until play equipment is repaired or replaced.
- Use mild detergent and clean water to wash children's outside toys, play equipment, and recreational equipment.
- Sand, gravel or other loose materials placed beneath playground equipment should be removed and replaced whenever there is visible presence of ash, silt and small debris.
- If you suspect or know a sand box was impacted by fire or firefighting materials, the sand should be replaced.

5. Clean up fire retardant and residue

Some fire retardants can make people and pets sick if ingested. Fire retardants can cause eye irritation, dry skin, and stinging to cuts and scrapes on your skin. Consult your family physician as soon as possible if you experience any reaction to these products.

If your home was sprayed with fire retardants or was impacted by windblown fire retardant, these products need to be removed from the outside siding and roof of your house, your vehicles, and any outside toys, furniture, tools etc. A fire restoration contractor will be able to help you with this.

If you decide to manage this yourself:

- Wash down your home's roof and siding, vehicles, and outdoor patio furniture with clean water.
- To clean windows and glass, use clean water and a razor blade tool to help to remove the sticky residue.
- Rinse retardant off vegetation.
- **Never use bleach**, as the reaction between bleach and the fire retardants will produce harmful and explosive gases.
- Use mild detergent and clean water to wash children's outside toys, play equipment, and recreational equipment to remove any residual fire retardant.
- Keep your pets and children away from any water pooling from these cleaning activities.

6. Clean up lawns, gardens and vegetation

- Absorb any standing water containing fire retardant materials with soil or sand
- Regularly wet down your garden and lawn until the smoke and ash have been diluted and/or reabsorbed into the air. Ash and soot on vegetation will continue to emit smoke odours for some time.
- Rinse fire retardant off vegetation such as trees, shrubs and plants, if possible.
- It is not safe to eat fruits or vegetables that were growing above ground during the fire
- It is not recommended that you eat vegetables growing below soil that was affected by fire

For additional information on wildfire recovery please go to the following Environmental Public Health website:
www.ahs.ca/epwildfire

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For more information, please contact your nearest Environmental Public Health office.

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