Reopening Your Health Care Clinic After a Wildfire

Community-based Health Care Settings (CHCS) include, but are not limited to, clinics offering medical, dental, podiatry, acupuncture, and chiropractic services. When reopening a CHCS after a wildfire, take the following precautions.

In addition to the physical damage fires cause, there are risks associated with smoke, ash, chemicals and water that damage both the building and equipment on-site.

Work with your insurance company agent to determine what information is needed and what actions to take to get your facility ready to operate. They may also recommend accredited restoration and cleaning contractors for your situation.

Below are the most immediate steps that should be followed once it is SAFE to enter the premises.

1. **Protect yourself**
   - Wear protective personal equipment (PPE) that includes a mask and gloves when assessing and cleaning your establishment.
   - Follow current respiratory protection guidelines appropriate for your situation. Further information is available from Alberta Labour (available at [https://work.alberta.ca/occupational-health-safety/fort-mcmurray-wildfires.html](https://work.alberta.ca/occupational-health-safety/fort-mcmurray-wildfires.html)).
   - Use a flashlight to look for hazards. If you detect or suspect any source of heat or smoke, notify the fire department immediately.
   - Watch for hazards, including:
     - Slip, trip and fall hazards from unstable structures, or wet and slippery surfaces
     - Sharp objects such as metal pieces, concrete or wood
     - Ash, soot and demolition dust
     - Hazardous materials such as chemicals used for personal services, kitchen and bathroom cleaning products, pesticides, paint, batteries, and fuel containers which have been partially damaged or destroyed.
     - Propane cylinders for heating or from a BBQ.
2. **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](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/wf/eph/wf-eh-wildfire-smoke-and-your-health.pdf) available at

  - 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.

3. **Check your utilities**

- Check that electricity, hot and cold running water, sewage system, and gas utilities are in proper working order. If you are not sure if the utilities are safe to use, contact utility provider.

- Do not try to use any electrical appliances 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.

- Do not attempt to use any large electrical equipment, until the equipment has been deemed safe to use by a qualified professional. You may need to contact the manufacturer for further instructions.
4. **Use your water supply safely**

- Flush all hot and cold water-using fixtures by running the tap for five minutes. If your service connection is long or complex, consider flushing for a longer period of time.


5. **Clean building and facilities**

- Use PPE as appropriate, such as masks, rubber gloves, rubber boots, long sleeved shirt and pants, to protect yourself from any unknown residues.

- Structural components of the building (e.g., piping, ceiling, and HVAC system/ventilation systems) should be removed, repaired, or cleaned and disinfected, as needed.

- Discard all absorbent materials (e.g. carpet, drywall, etc.) that have been water damaged. Mould growth is a concern if your facility has had water damage from fire suppression systems or firefighting activities.

- If possible, use a vacuum with a unit that has a “HEPA” air filter to catch ash particles. Change the HEPA filter often.

- Thoroughly wash facility interior surfaces such as floors, walls, windows and ceilings, with a hot detergent solution and then rinsed free of detergents and residues.

- Steam clean any carpets, drapes, curtains or furniture you may have. Change the water frequently.

- Clean and disinfect sinks thoroughly before using them,
6. **Equipment & instruments**

- All equipment and instruments in the facility must be inspected and assessed by the operator. All equipment and instruments affected by heat, ash, chemicals, smoke, soot, or water must either be discarded, or cleaned and disinfected/sterilized as appropriate.

- All consumable products (single-use medical devices) found in the CHCS should be discarded.

- Medical device reprocessing (MDR) areas should be re-commissioned. Thoroughly clean and disinfect MDR area and ensure table top sterilizers undergo operational requalification:
  - Operational requalification testing of both dynamic air removal and gravity sterilizers shall be conducted by running three consecutive cycles using biological indicator challenge tests.
  - Dynamic air removal (vacuum) sterilizers shall additionally be tested with three consecutive air removal (Bowie-Dick) tests in an otherwise empty sterilizer.

- Use new single-use medical devices until MDR area in the office has been re-commissioned.

- Review practices for MDR in the office to ensure that all aspects can be completed as required before considering commencing reprocessing activities.

- Reprocess (clean and sterilize) all packaged reusable instruments and instrument sets before use.

- Remove and discard items exposed to heat, ash, chemicals, soot, water and smoke including:
  - Medicines, vaccines, disinfectants, alcohol-based hand rub, and other similar supplies
  - Items where the packaging has been compromised

- Follow current local guidelines on where waste may be discarded

- Contact your insurance company for information about restoring / replacing electronic devices.
7. **Discard damaged and unsafe food products**

- Any food that has spoiled.
- 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, single service items/utensils which also includes individually plastic-wrapped items
  - bottles and jars of food with screw top lids or crown/crimp caps
  - damaged, dented or bulging cans

- Clean and then sanitize canned foods/drinks exposed to **smoke only**. You can make a sanitizing solution by mixing ½ tsp bleach into 1 litre of water.
- Follow current local guidelines on where food waste may be discarded.

For more information please contact Alberta Health Services, Environmental Public Health, North Zone at 780-513-7517.