

# Reopening Your Food Establishment After a Wildfire

In addition to the physical damage fires cause, there are risks associated with smoke, ash, chemicals and water that damage both the building and food 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](https://work.alberta.ca/occupational-health-safety/fort-mcmurray-wildfires.html) (available at <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 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 <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/wf/eph/wf-eh-wildfire-smoke-and-your-health.pdf>
- 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 your utility provider.
- Do not try to use any electrical appliances or power 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.

## 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.

- Building maintenance and superintendent staff of buildings with larger water service connections (e.g. hotels/motels, grocery stores, malls) should review “[Water Flushing Procedure for Large Buildings Affected by the Fort McMurray Fire](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/Assets/wf/eph/wf-eh-water-flushing-procedures-large-buildings-affected-by-wildfire.pdf)”  
<http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/Assets/wf/eph/wf-eh-water-flushing-procedures-large-buildings-affected-by-wildfire.pdf>.
- Your facility may be under a boil water advisory. Review “[How to Use Water Safely in Your Food Establishment During a Boil Water Advisory](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/wf/eph/wf-eh-use-water-safely-food-establishment-bwa-fmm-fires.pdf)” for information on how to use water safely. Information is available at:  
<http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/wf/eph/wf-eh-use-water-safely-food-establishment-bwa-fmm-fires.pdf>.
- You do not need to boil your water to clean the facility prior to opening.
- Once the boil water advisory is lifted:
  - Remove all aerator or screen devices from faucets.
  - Flush all hot and cold water-using fixtures and faucets by running them for five minutes. If your service connection is long or complex, consider flushing for a longer period of time. This step must be completed even if you flushed your system prior to the boil water advisory being lifted.
  - Rinse out any sediment or debris from the aerator or screen devices and put them back on the faucet.
  - Clean and disinfect all surfaces and equipment that have been in contact with tap water during the boil water advisory.
  - Ensure equipment with water line connections such as post-mix beverage machines, auto-fill coffee/tea makers, instant hot water heaters, ice machines, slush machines, vegetable spray lines/misters etc. are flushed, cleaned and disinfected according to the manufacturer’s recommendations before use.
  - Flush, drain, clean and disinfect cisterns that contained the affected water source. See [How to Clean and Disinfect a Cistern](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/wf/eph/wf-eh-how-clean-disinfect-cistern-fmm-fire.pdf) at  
<http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/wf/eph/wf-eh-how-clean-disinfect-cistern-fmm-fire.pdf>.
  - Run water softeners through a regeneration cycle according to the manufacturer’s recommendations before use.
  - Replace the 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 some water be drained to get rid of any sediment.

## 5. *Discard Damaged and Unsafe Food Products*

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

- 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.
- Discard any food that has spoiled, even if the cooler remained at 4°C at all times.
- 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**
- Use proper garbage receptacles and containers when discarding food products to minimize potential issues related to odour and attraction of pests.
- Keep track of 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.
- 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 the Fort McMurray Re-entry Information Package guidelines for discarding fridges and/or 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.

## **6. Clean building and facilities**

When cleaning and sanitizing, ensure you wear protective equipment including goggles, a mask and gloves to protect yourself from any unknown residues.

- Contact a professional to clean your ducts and ventilation systems.
- Use a vacuum with a unit that has a “HEPA” air filter to catch ash particles. Change the HEPA filter often.
- Discard all absorbent materials (e.g. carpet, drywall, etc.) that have been water or fire damaged. Mould growth is a concern if your facility has had water damage from fire suppression systems or firefighting activities.
- Thoroughly wash all facility interior surfaces including floors, walls, windows and ceilings using potable water, with a hot detergent solution and rinsed free of detergents and residues.
- Steam clean any carpets, drapes, curtains or furniture you may have. Change the water frequently.

## **7. Clean and Sanitize Equipment**

- Unplug and rinse the coils and compressors on your coolers and freezers.
- Clean and sanitize all refrigerator, coolers, and freezers. Directions on sanitizing solutions are provided below.
- Ensure all refrigerated storage (refrigerators and coolers) can maintain temperatures of 4°C or less.
- Use a commercial dishwasher or three-compartment sink to wash, rinse, and sanitize equipment and utensils using potable water. Ensure dishwashers are achieving the necessary temperatures and sanitizer concentrations.
- **Before washing equipment and utensils**, run the dishwasher empty through the wash-rinse-sanitize cycle three times. This practice will flush the water lines and clean and sanitize the interior of the dishwasher.

- Thoroughly clean and sanitized all food equipment including ice machines, prep counters, and meat slicers.
- Thoroughly clean and sanitize all sinks before using them.
- Ensure equipment is in good working order, as per manufactured specifications. Some equipment may be severely damaged from the fire and must be repaired or replaced.

## Sanitizing Solutions

Cleaning and sanitizing will remove debris and soot, harmful microorganisms and chemical residues that could pose a food safety risk. The first step is to physically remove dirt, dust and residues. Cleaning equipment and surfaces using a solution of non-reactive cleaners (e.g. dish soap) and water will allow sanitizers can effectively remove harmful bacteria.

Chemical sanitizers include:

- chlorine bleach at a concentration of 100 - 200 ppm (approximately one tablespoon of bleach in one gallon of potable water), or
- quaternary ammonium at a concentration of 200 ppm, or
- other approved sanitizers

## 8. Before Opening for the Public

- Verify that all refrigerated and freezer display cases, walk-in refrigerators, and walk-in freezers are capable of consistently maintaining proper temperatures. Refrigeration units must keep foods less than 4°C and freezers must keep foods in a frozen state. Ensure temperatures can be maintained **before** replacement food items are placed in the units.
- Verify that all equipment used for food preparation (e.g., cooking, cooling, and reheating) can operate according to the manufacturer's specifications/instructions.
- Ensure handwashing basins are operational, stocked with hand soap and paper towels, and accessible.

**Contact Alberta Health Services, Environmental Public Health, North Zone at 780-513-7517 to arrange an inspection prior to resuming food preparation and service to the public.**

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

Edmonton Main Office  
Calgary Main Office  
Lethbridge Main Office

780-735-1800  
403-943-2288  
403-388-6689

Grande Prairie Main Office  
Red Deer Main Office  
[www.ahs.ca/eph](http://www.ahs.ca/eph)

780-513-7517  
403-356-6366

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