

# What to do After a Fire

## THINGS TO DO AND PEOPLE TO CONTACT

### Insurance and Other Assistance

- Contact your insurance company as soon as possible.
- If you are renting, contact the property owner or the owner's insurance company.
- If you are not insured, contact your lawyer or the IRS for directions.
- Contact the American Red Cross Sonora Chapter (209-533-1513) for disaster relief services or visit them through the American Red Cross Sacramento Sierra Chapter: [www.sacsierrareddcross.org](http://www.sacsierrareddcross.org)

### Your Property

- Secure the site from further damage by weather, theft, or vandalism. This is the owner's responsibility.
- Check with the Fire Department to see if the utilities are shut off and if the structure is safe to enter.
- Inventory damaged personal property. Note in detail the quantity, description, cost, length of time you have had the items, the damage sustained and replacement cost. Take photographs if possible. Do not throw away damaged goods until the inventory has been done.

### Other Tips

- Do not contract for repair services without first consulting your insurance agent
- Save all receipts for expenses incurred due to fire.

## THINGS TO DO IF YOU HAVE TO LEAVE YOUR HOME

### Remember the Following Items

- Identification
- Medicines - (if damaged in the fire, notify your pharmacy for replacement of current medications)
- Eyeglasses, hearing aids, or other personal aids
- Valuables - credit cards, checkbooks, insurance policies, savings account books, money, jewelry, etc.

### If You Have To Relocate Notify:

- The Fire Department 209-962-7891
- Your employer
- Delivery services
- Family and friends
- Your insurance agent
- The mortgage company
- The post office

## REPLACING VALUABLE DOCUMENTS AND RECORDS

Below is a checklist of documents that are commonly lost in a fire. Under the type of document is the institution or agency to contact for a replacement.

### Financial Records

- Bank books - Notify your bank as soon as possible

- Credit cards - Notify the issuing companies as soon as possible
- Income tax records - Call the Internal Revenue Service Center at 1-800-829-1040, visit their website at [www.irs.gov/index.html](http://www.irs.gov/index.html) or notify your accountant
- Stocks and bonds - Notify the issuing company or your broker

### **Identification and Licenses**

- Driver's license - Call the Department of Motor Vehicles at 1-800-777-0133 or visit their website at [www.dmv.ca.gov/](http://www.dmv.ca.gov/)
- Passports - Notify the Passport Office by calling 1-877-487-2778. Operators are available 6 a.m. to midnight EST, Monday - Friday, excluding Federal holidays or visit their website at [http://travel.state.gov/passport/passport\\_1738.html](http://travel.state.gov/passport/passport_1738.html)
- Welfare recipient identification cards for check cashing, medical aid, or food stamps - Notify your case worker.

### **Legal Documents**

- Birth, death, marriage certificates - Notify the State Bureau of Records in the state of birth, death or marriage
- Citizenship papers - Notify the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service
- Divorce papers - Notify the Circuit Court where the decree was issued
- Military discharge papers - Notify the local office of the Veterans Administration
- Social Security or Medicare cards - Notify the local social security office
- Wills - Notify your lawyer

### **Property**

- Auto registration title - Notify the Department of Motor Vehicles
- Titles to deeds - Notify the records department of city or county in which the property is located
- Prepaid burial contracts - Notify the issuing company

### **Other Papers**

- Animal registration papers - Notify the Society of Registry
- Insurance policies - Notify your insurance agent
- Medical records - Notify your doctor
- Warranties - Notify the issuing company

### **REPAIR AND SALVAGE TIPS**

Before beginning repair or salvage ask your insurance agent if the following items would be replaced. This may depend on the severity of the fire.

#### **Woodstoves/ Fireplaces and Flues**

- A certified chimney sweep professional should inspect your woodstove/ fireplace, piping, flue, mortar, bricks, flue cap, and screen to assess for any damage
- Your chimney or flue may need to be repaired and relined to make it safe Do not light another fire in the woodstove or fireplace until you have had it serviced by a professional chimney sweep company and has been certified as safe to use.

## **Clothing**

- Soot, smoke and water stains can often be washed from clothing. Use the following formula: 4-6 tablespoons of tri-sodium phosphate, 2 tablespoons of sodium (hypochlorite can be substituted), 1 cup of household chlorine bleach, and 1 gallon of water. Mix well, soak clothing, rinse with clear water and dry well. Wear plastic gloves
- Mildew may be removed by washing the fresh stains in soap and water, rinse and dry in the sun. Note: mildew is a bacteria growth not simple dirt
- If stain and odor are not removed initially try lemon juice and salt or 1 tablespoon of perborate bleach in 1 pint of lukewarm water, or diluted solution of household chlorine bleach

## **Cooking Utensils**

- Wash pots, pans, flatware with soapy water, rinse and polish with fine powdered cleaner
- Soak wood utensils in soap and water to insure smoke particles are out

## **Electrical Items**

- Household wiring may be damaged so have it inspected by an electrician
- Is the gas and electrical service shut-off? Call the utility company to check and restore these services
- Do not use appliances if wet or damp. Wait until they are checked by an appliance service person

## **Flooring and Rugs**

- Linoleum and vinyl floor coverings may have to be removed if water damaged
- Dampness can cause odor and warped floors
- Let the floor dry completely, prior to replacement. If the mildew is not dead, odor may return
- Rugs and carpeting must be allowed to dry thoroughly. Flush dirt out first. Dye in rugs may bleed the longer it remains wet
- Lay rugs flat and expose them to circulating warm dry air
- Wall to wall carpet is usually better cared for if left in place. It can be cleaned professionally or with a commercial grade rental machine. Re-stretching may be needed
- Brush pile carpets in one direction to dry
- If furniture cannot be removed, cover legs with aluminum foil or plastic to avoid rusting or stains on the carpet
- CAUTION - you can receive an electric shock if vacuum is not designed to pick-up water
- For more information, contact your local carpet dealer

## **Food**

- Beverages, food and medicines exposed to heat, smoke or soot should be discarded properly
- To remove odor from your refrigerator or freezer wash the inside with a solution of baking soda and water or use one cup of vinegar or household ammonia to one gallon of water
- Baking soda in an open container, or a piece of charcoal can be placed in a refrigerator or freezer to absorb odors

## **Leather and Books**

- Wipe leather goods with a damp cloth, then dry with a soft cloth
- Stuff purses and shoes with newspaper to retain shape
- Leave suitcases open to the air
- Leather goods should be allowed to dry in a well ventilated area away from direct sun or heat

- Use of polish or saddle soap on smooth leather items can restore necessary lanolin and oils
- Suede items can be brushed with a light steel wool, fine wire brush or fine sandpaper
- Books can be dried by placing them on end, followed by pressing the book together - when reasonable dried, alternate drying and pressing to help prevent mildew until thoroughly dried.
- Sprinkling cornstarch or talc between the pages of a book will aid in the drying a very damp book - leave powders on for several hours and then lightly brush off
- If drying of books must be delayed, place in cold storage to delay mildew from forming
- Consult a dry cleaner for heavily stained leather garments

### **Locks and Hinges**

- Take locks and hinges apart if possible and wipe with kerosene and oil
- If they cannot be taken apart or removed, squirt machine oil through bolt opening or keyhole and work knob to distribute the oil

### **Mattresses and Pillows**

- Reconditioning an inner spring mattress at home is very difficult, if not impossible - replace or take to a company that builds or repairs mattresses.
- It is impossible to remove smoke odor from pillows, replacement is best.

### **Money, Coins and Savings Bonds**

- Handle burned money as little as possible. Attempt to encase each bill or portion of a bill in plastic wrap for preservation
- If money is only half-burned or less (if half or more of the bill is intact), you can take the remainder to your local Federal Reserve Bank for replacement. Ask your personal bank for the nearest one. Or you can mail the burned or torn money via first class registered mail to: US Treasury Department Main Treasury Building, Room 1123, Washington, DC 20220
- Mutilated or melted coins can be taken to the Federal Reserve Bank or mailed via first class registered mail to: Superintendent, US Assay Office, 32 Old Slip, New York, NY 10005
- If your US Savings Bonds have been mutilated or destroyed, write to: US Treasury Department, Bureau of Public Debt, Division of Loans and Currency, 537 South Clark Street, Chicago, IL 60605, Attn: Bond Consultant. Include name(s) and address(s) on bonds, approximate date or time period when purchased, denominations and approximate number of each denomination

### **Wood Furniture and Fixtures**

- Smoke and soot will often travel to areas where the fire has not reached. Therefore, for smoke and soot damage as well as water damage, care must be taken when cleaning wood furniture and fixtures to prevent surface scarring.
- Wipe off all finished surfaces with a soft cloth dampened with a mild cleaning solution.
- Remove all drawers and open cabinets so they can dry thoroughly. This will prevent sticking.
- Clean friction surfaces (tracts and guilds) with a stiff brush and cleaning solution
- Dry thoroughly; wet wood can mold and decay.
- Open doors and windows for ventilation and if necessary, turn on a heater or air conditioner.
- If mold is present or forms, wipe the area with a cloth soaked in a mixture of water and kerosene or Borax dissolve in water
- Do not dry furniture in the sun. The wood may warp and twist out of shape
- To remove white spots or film, rub the surface with a cloth soaked in a solution of one-half cup of household ammonia and one half cup of water. Wipe dry and polish with furniture wax or a solution of one half cup turpentine and one half cup linseed oil.

- You can also rub the wood surface with a 4/0 steel wool pad dripped in liquid polishing wax, wipe with a soft cloth and then buff.
- For draperies damaged by smoke or odor, a reputable drapery cleaner should be contacted for a free estimate.
- **CAUTION:** Most furniture polishes and the turpentine-linseed solution are flammable. The cloth used in applying them is susceptible to spontaneous ignition so hang the cloth outdoors to allow drying.