



Returning to Your Neighborhood

Visiting your property for the first time since the evacuation will be an emotional experience and we want you to know that you are not alone—there are many people and agencies here to help you. This loss of a physical home, a shelter, a place of security, filled with memories, is difficult to bear. For many, a sense of home comes from neighbors and from the wider community. The building you called home may be gone, but your community is with you to help you recover and rebuild. We extend our deepest sympathy to you and your family and we want you to know that we are committed to assuring you have access to the services and support you need.

Please familiarize yourself with the information in this packet. It contains important details about the hazards of entering an area that has been in a fire.

What Has Occurred in Your Neighborhood Since the Fire

Crews have removed propane tanks, utility lines, and environmental hazards. Utility providers have gone through to shut off gas, electrical and water services.

Thorough searches for missing people who may have perished in the fire were undertaken with the utmost care and respect for the deceased and their families.

What to Expect When You Arrive in Your Neighborhood

Once evacuation orders are lifted, you will need to get an entry pass. Entry passes will be distributed at check in locations. Once you have received an entry pass you may enter your neighborhood through one of the official entry points.

The Condition of Your Property: After a fire, many dangers remain and if you choose to enter the property, you are doing so at your own risk. For your safety, building inspectors have inspected homes that appear damaged from the exterior. When visiting your property, you may find it in one of the following conditions:

1. **No Structure Remaining** – There is no structure standing on your property.
2. **Partial Structure Remaining** – Some homes have sections of walls or chimneys still standing. These structures are not secure and pose an immediate risk of collapse. If you choose to enter the property, you are doing so at your own risk.
3. **Red-Tagged** – The home is standing but is not safe to enter. The structure on your property was inspected by a building inspector and deemed unsafe to enter. Conditions of structural support may be severely damaged and entry could cause bodily injury or even death. If your home is red-tagged, please contact the building official on-site or your local permitting agency to arrange for an escorted entry into the property.
4. **Standing Structure** – The structure on your property is standing and is safe to enter. Although these properties may look intact, they may have sustained smoke or other damage. Structures that do not show damage from the exterior have not been inspected.

If your property was not evacuated but was adjacent to or in close proximity to the fire, you may want to consider getting your home inspected for damage and check to see if you qualify for coverage.

Taking Care of Yourself and Your Family

Know that You Have the Right to Privacy: The media has helped us stay connected and informed during these devastating fires; part of that coverage has included personal stories about how people's lives have been impacted. You and your family are under no obligation to consent to be interviewed, photographed or filmed. If approached by a member of the media (reporter, camera person, photographer), you have the right to request your privacy.

As you return to your property our focus will be on providing you with safe, secure, and private time to evaluate your situation. We have asked that the media be respectful of this highly personal and difficult time, as you return to your neighborhood and reunite with friends and neighbors, evaluate your losses, and determine next steps.

Looking Through the Remains of Your Property: Sifting for valuables is permitted but not recommended for health reasons. Small scale sifting through ashes to locate remaining personal items will not impact your ability to get financial assistance. Please be advised that digging, piling materials up or moving large pieces on or off the property can jeopardize your eligibility for state and federally sponsored cleanup and could put your health at risk.

If you choose to search through the remains of your home, wear proper protective equipment and take the following precautions:

- Wear sturdy shoes, long sleeve shirts and long pants
- Wear protective gear such as gloves, protective masks and goggles
- Keep children and pets away
- Anything with ash should be sanitized and cleaned
- Asbestos, heavy metals, by-products of plastic combustion and various other chemicals may be present in your home and neighborhood
- Walk around the perimeter before entering, noting any debris and structure that could fall

Emotional Support is important for all who experienced this disaster. The emotional toll can be devastating and further compounded the financial strains of losing your home, business, or personal property. Profound sadness, grief, and anger are normal reactions to an event such as this. During your return to your neighborhood emotional support services will be available including mental health providers and clergy. For additional support, please call 2-1-1 to be connected with providers in your area.

***Disposing of
Hazardous
Materials***

The County of Sonoma and the State of California's Office of Emergency Services (Cal-OES) will be coordinating a cleanup effort of private properties that ensures safe disposal. This will be in both the incorporated and unincorporated areas. Ash and debris from burned buildings and homes can contain toxic substances due to the presence of synthetic and hazardous materials.

Household hazardous waste must be handled separately from other burn debris and may not go into local landfills. Residents are strongly urged to leave all the debris in place and are encouraged to NOT remove items from their property. Household hazardous waste includes unused or leftover portions of products used in your home that contain toxic chemicals. Products labeled *caution, warning, danger, poison, toxic, flammable or corrosive* are considered hazardous waste.

***Recovery and
Rebuilding***

Visiting your neighborhood in the aftermath of the fire is a difficult and yet important step in recovery and preparing for what comes next. Our collective goal is to make rebuilding your home or business as smooth and clear a process as possible. We are working to establish programs to speed up and assist with rebuilding your home and our community.

We are with you and together we will recover and rebuild our community.

***Important
Contacts***

www.sonoma-county.org
www.srcity.org/recovery

Sonoma County Department of Health	707-565-6565
Sonoma County Animal Services	707-565-7100
Sonoma County Community Hotline	707-565-3856
Santa Rosa Recovery Information	707-543-4511
Santa Rosa Police Department	707-543-5222
FEMA	800-621-3362
American Red Cross	707-577-7600



County of Sonoma Department of Health Services
Environmental Health
625 5th Street, Santa Rosa, CA 95404
707-565-6565, Fax 707-565-6525
www.sonoma-county.org/eh



Safety When Returning To Your Home or Business after a Fire

A fire in a home can cause serious damage, and in some cases total loss. The building and many of the items in your home or business may have been badly damaged by flames, heat, smoke, and water.

You may find things that the fire did not burn up but are now ruined by smoke and soggy with water used to put out the flames. Anything that you want to save or reuse will need to be carefully cleaned.

Firefighters may have cut holes in the walls of the building to look for hidden flames. They may have cut holes in the roof to let out heat and smoke. Cleanup will take time and patience.

General Safety Tips: USE CAUTION!

- Wear sturdy shoes (steel toes and shanks are recommended), a mask, and clothing.
- Hazardous chemicals and conditions may be present.
- Inspect propane tanks for visible damage before turning on.
- Wear protective gear when sorting through possessions. Anything in contact with ash should be sanitized and cleaned. Sorting through/cleaning burn debris is **not recommended for health reasons**.
- Be aware of slip, trip, fall, and puncture hazards.

It is important to understand the risk to your safety and health even after the fire is out. The soot and dirty water left behind could make you ill.

Be very careful if you touch any fire-damaged items. Ask the advice of the fire department, local building officials, your insurance agent, and restoration specialists before starting to clean or make repairs.

Do not eat, drink, or breathe in anything that has been near the flames, smoke soot, or water used to put the fire out.

Safety

Fire ash may be irritating to the skin, nose, and throat may cause coughing and/or nose bleeds. Fine particles can be inhaled deeply into lungs and may aggravate asthma and may make it difficult to breathe.

- **Refrain from cleaning ash and fire debris until professional hazardous material cleanup services are secured. Seek professional damage and debris removal/restoration services.**
- When exposure to dust or ash cannot be avoided, use a well-fitted NIOSH-certified air-purifying respirator N-95 mask.
- Children should not be in the vicinity while cleanup is in progress. Even if care is exercised, it is easy to stir up ash that may contain hazardous substances.
- Clean ash off house pets and other domesticated animals if they have been in contaminated areas.
- It is best to not allow pets in these areas due to the potential risk to their health and their ability to spread outside of contaminated areas.
- Wear gloves, long-sleeved shirts, and long pants to avoid skin contact. Goggles are recommended. Contact with wet ash may cause chemical burns or irritation on skin. Change your shoes and clothing prior to leaving the decontamination site, to avoid tracking ash into your car, home, etc.

Water

Do not use your water if you suspect or have been told it is contaminated to wash dishes, brush your teeth, wash and prepare food, wash your hands, make ice, or make baby formula. Safe water for drinking, cooking, and personal hygiene includes bottled, boiled, or treated water.

If you have a drinking water well, listen to your local health authorities for advice on using your well water.

Handwashing

Keeping hands clean during an emergency helps prevent the spread of germs. If your tap water is not safe to use, wash your hands with soap and water that has been boiled or disinfected or use a large water jug that contains clean water.

To wash your hands properly:

- Wet your hands with clean, running water and apply soap.
- Rub your hands together (20 seconds) to make a lather and scrub them well.
- Rinse your hands well under running water.
- Dry your hands using a clean towel or air dry them.

If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

Food Safety

Foods exposed to fire can be compromised. Reheating food that has become contaminated will not make it safe - When in doubt, throw it out!

- Food in cans, jars, bottles, and other permeable containers may appear to be okay, but if they have been close to the heat of a fire, they may no longer be safe. Heat from a fire can activate food spoilage bacteria. If the heat is extreme, the cans or jars themselves can split or rupture, rendering the food unsafe.
- Foods that are exposed to toxic fumes and chemicals should be thrown away. Toxic fumes can permeate the packaging and contaminate the food. Any type of food stored in permeable packaging (cardboard, plastic wrap, etc.) should be thrown away. Discard any raw foods stored outside the refrigerator such as potatoes or fruit that could be contaminated by fumes.
- Food stored in refrigerators or freezers can also become contaminated by fumes. Chemicals used to fight fires contain toxic materials and can contaminate food and cookware.

Food facilities need to seek Environmental Health Services prior to reopening your facility. Contact Environmental Health at 707-565-6565.

Cleaning and Sanitizing

Cleaning and sanitizing your household after an emergency is important to help prevent the spread of illness and disease.

Clean and sanitize surfaces in a four-step process:

- Wash with soap and hot, clean water.
- Rinse with clean water.
- Sanitize by immersing for 1 minute in a solution of 1 cup (8 oz/240 mL) of unscented household chlorine bleach in 5 gallons of clean water.
- Allow to air dry.

Please remember the following safety tips when cleaning:

- Never mix bleach with ammonia or any other cleaner.
- Wear rubber or other non-porous boots, gloves, and eye protection.
- Try not to breathe in product fumes. If using products indoors, open windows and doors to allow fresh air to enter.



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Protecting Public Health from Fire Ash

All persons accessing burned structures should be aware of the potential hazards associated with those sites. Cleanup efforts at these sites may expose you to ash, soot, and fire decomposition products that can cause health effects including, but not limited to, eye/skin/respiratory irritation. If possible, try to **AVOID** direct contact with ash. If you get ash on your skin, in your eyes, or in your mouth, wash it off as soon as you can, with clean or sterile water.

Ash from burned structures is generally more hazardous than forest ash. Fire ash contains microscopic particles (dust, dirt, soot) that can be deposited on indoor and outdoor surfaces and can also be inhaled if the ash becomes airborne. Unless tested, the ash is not classified as a hazardous waste, however it may contain traces of hazardous chemicals such as metals (lead, cadmium, nickel and arsenic), asbestos (from older homes or other buildings), perfluorochemicals (from degradation of non-stick cookware), flame retardants, and caustic materials. For these reasons, it is advisable to be cautious and avoid any unnecessary exposure to the ash.

Health Effects of Ash: Fire ash may be irritating to the skin, nose, and throat, and may cause coughing and/or nose bleeds. Fine particles can be inhaled deeply into lungs and may aggravate asthma and make it difficult to breathe. If the ash contains asbestos, nickel, arsenic or cadmium, then exposure is a particular concern because these substances can cause cancer. Because the substances in the ash vary, it is always best to be cautious.

High-Risk Persons: People with asthma or other lung diseases, pregnant women, and the elderly or very young should exercise special caution because they may be more susceptible to health effects from the ash.

Children: Do not allow children to play in ash. Wash and clean all children's toys carefully after possible contamination. Children should not be in the vicinity while cleanup is in progress. Even if you care is exercised, it is easy to stir up ash that may contain hazardous substances. In addition, the exploratory behavior of children may result in direct contact with contaminated materials.

Pets: Clean ash off house pets and other domesticated animals if they have been in contaminated areas. However, it is best to not allow pets in these areas due to the potential risk to their health and their ability to spread outside of contaminated areas.

Clothing: Covering clothing is recommended, when in proximity to ash. Wear gloves, long-sleeved shirts, and long pants to avoid skin contact, whenever possible. Goggles are recommended. Contact with wet ash may cause chemical burns or irritation on skin. Change your shoes and clothing prior to leaving the decontamination site, to avoid tracking ash into your car, home, etc.

Masks: When exposure to dust or ash cannot be avoided, use a well-fitted NIOSH-certified air-purifying respirator mask. This type of mask can be purchased from most hardware stores. A mask rated N-95 is much more effective than unrated dust- or surgical-masks in blocking ash particles. Although smaller sized masks may appear to fit a child's face, manufacturers do not recommend their use for children. If your child is in an area that warrants wearing a mask, you should remove them from that area to an environment with cleaner air.