



# After the Fire!

Returning to Normal

FA-46/June 2016



FEMA

## Vital Information

Date of fire: \_\_\_\_\_

Time of fire: \_\_\_\_\_

Location of fire: \_\_\_\_\_

Vehicle identification number for  
cars, trucks, and motorcycles destroyed: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of the responding fire department:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Address of the responding fire department:  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Nonemergency telephone number  
of responding fire department: \_\_\_\_\_

Fire incident report number issued  
by the responding fire department: \_\_\_\_\_

Fire marshal or fire investigator: \_\_\_\_\_

Insurance company name: \_\_\_\_\_

Insurance company  
telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Insurance policy number: \_\_\_\_\_

A fire will change your life in many ways. Knowing where to begin and who can help you is important. The U.S. Fire Administration hopes you find this information useful in your journey to return to normal.

### What to Expect

A fire in a home can cause serious damage. The building and many of the things in your home may have been badly damaged by flames, heat, smoke and water.

You will find that things the fire did not burn up 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.

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

**If your home had a home fire sprinkler system, you will find little damage from flames, heat, smoke and water. If you plan to rebuild your home, now is the time to think about installing sprinklers. You can find more information at the Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition's website: [www.hfsc.org](http://www.hfsc.org).**

## **Use Caution**

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 may contain things that could make you sick.

Be very careful if you go into your home and 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.

## **Frequently Asked Questions About Fire Department Actions**

Q: Why did firefighters break windows and cut holes in the roof?

A: As a fire burns, it moves up, down and across, growing very fast. Breaking windows and cutting holes in the roof is called ventilation. This slows the fire's growth. It helps get rid of dark smoke that makes it hard for firefighters to see. It helps them fight the fire more quickly. In the end, ventilation can help save lives and property.

Q: Why do firefighters cut holes in walls?

A: Firefighters may cut holes in the walls to make sure that the fire is completely out and not hidden in the walls.

Q: How can I get a copy of the fire report?

A: In most areas, a fire report is a public document. Ask for it at the fire department or the fire marshal's office. The fire report will provide you with information your insurance company and other official offices may need.



## What Do I Do Now?

### Take Care of Yourself and Family

Contact your local disaster relief service, such as the American Red Cross or the Salvation Army. They will help you find a place to stay and to find food, clothing and medicine. Make sure that you have a safe place to live temporarily. You have a big job ahead of you. Get plenty of rest, and ask for help. Do not try to do it all alone.

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

### Help Your Pets

If you have pets, find and comfort them. Scared animals often react by biting or scratching. Handle them carefully, calmly and gently. Try to leave pets with a family member, friend or veterinarian if you are visiting or cleaning your damaged home. Keep your pets out of the house until the cleanup is complete to keep them safe.

### Security and Safety

Do not enter a damaged home or apartment unless the fire department says it is safe. Fires can start again, even if they appear to be out. Watch for damage caused by the fire. Roofs and floors may be damaged and could fall down.

The fire department will make sure the utility services (water, electricity and gas) are safe to use. If they are not safe, firefighters will have your utilities turned off or disconnected before they leave. **Do not** try to turn them back on by yourself.



Contact your police department to let the police know that you will be away from your home. In some cases, you may need to board up openings so that no one can get in when you're not there.

### **Contact Your Insurance Agent**

Contact your insurance company right away. Ask what to do about the immediate needs of your home. This includes pumping out water and covering doors, windows and other openings.

Ask your insurance company what to do first. Some companies may ask you to make a list of everything that was damaged by the fire. They will ask you to describe these items in detail and say how much you paid for them.

If you do not have insurance, your family and community might help you get back on your feet. Organizations that might help include:

- American Red Cross.
- Salvation Army.
- Religious organizations.
- Public agencies, such as the public health department.
- Community groups.
- State or municipal emergency services office.
- Nonprofit crisis-counseling centers.

## **Finances**

Get in touch with your landlord or mortgage lender ASAP. Contact your credit card company to report credit cards that were lost in the fire and request replacements. Save all of your receipts for any money you spend. The receipts may be needed later by the insurance company. You will need the receipts to prove any losses claimed on your tax return.

## **Tips on How to Handle the Damage**

There are companies that are experts in cleaning and/or restoring your personal items.

Whether you or your insurer buys this type of service, be clear on who will pay for it. Be sure to ask for an estimate of cost for the work and agree to it in writing. You will find the names and phone numbers for companies that do this work in the phone book and on the internet.

Ask your insurance company for names of companies that you can trust.

These companies may provide services to:

- Secure your home against more damage.
- Estimate damage.
- Repair damage.
- Estimate the cost to repair or renew items of personal property.
- Store household items.
- Hire cleaning or repair subcontractors.
- Store repaired items until needed.



## The First Days of Recovery

### The Value of Your Home and Personal Belongings

Talk with your insurance company about how to learn the value of your home and property.

### Replacing Valuable Documents and Records

You will want to replace many of the following documents if they were destroyed or lost in the fire:

- Driver's license, auto registration.
- Bankbooks (checking, savings, etc.).
- Insurance policies.
- Military discharge papers.
- Passports.
- Birth, death and marriage certificates.
- Divorce papers.
- Social Security or Medicare cards.
- Credit cards.
- Titles to deeds.
- Stocks and bonds.
- Wills.
- Medical records.
- Warranties.
- Income tax records.
- Citizenship papers.
- Prepaid burial contract.
- Animal registration papers.
- Mortgage papers.



## Replacing Money

Handle burnt money as little as possible. Try to place each bill or part of a bill in plastic wrap to help preserve it. If money is partly burnt — if half or more is still OK — you can take the part that is left to your regional Federal Reserve Bank to get it replaced. Ask your bank for the one nearest you, or you can take the burnt or torn money to the post office and mail it by “registered mail, return receipt requested” to:

Department of the Treasury  
Bureau of Engraving and Printing  
Office of Currency Standards  
P.O. Box 37048  
Washington, DC 20013

Damaged or melted coins may be taken to your regional Federal Reserve Bank or mailed by “registered mail, return receipt requested” to:

Superintendent U.S. Mint  
P.O. Box 400  
Philadelphia, PA 19105

To replace U.S. savings bonds that are destroyed or mutilated, get the Department of Treasury Form PD F-1048 (I) from your bank or at [www.ustreas.gov](http://www.ustreas.gov) and mail to:

Department of the Treasury  
Bureau of the Public Debt  
Savings Bonds Operations  
P.O. Box 1328  
Parkersburg, WV 26106-1328

## Checklist for Next Steps After a Fire

Here are the steps to follow after a fire in your home:

- Contact your local disaster relief service, such as the American Red Cross. This will help you find a place to stay and to find food, clothing and medicine.
- If you have insurance, contact your insurance company. Ask what you should do to keep your home safe until it is repaired. Ask who you should talk to about cleaning up your home. If you are not insured, try contacting community groups for aid and assistance.
- Check with the fire department to make sure that your home is safe to enter. Be very careful when you go inside. Floors and walls may not be as safe as they look.
- The fire department will tell you if your utilities (water, electricity and gas) are safe to use. If not, firefighters will have your utilities shut off before they leave. **Do not** try to turn them back on by yourself. This could be very dangerous.
- Contact your landlord or mortgage company about the fire.
- Try to find valuable documents and records. See the information in this brochure about how to get new copies if you need them.
- If you leave your home, call the local police department to let the police know that the site will be vacant.
- Begin saving receipts for any money that you spend related to fire loss. The receipts may be needed later by the insurance company and to prove any losses claimed on your income tax.
- Check with an accountant or the IRS about special benefits for people recovering from fire loss.



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