

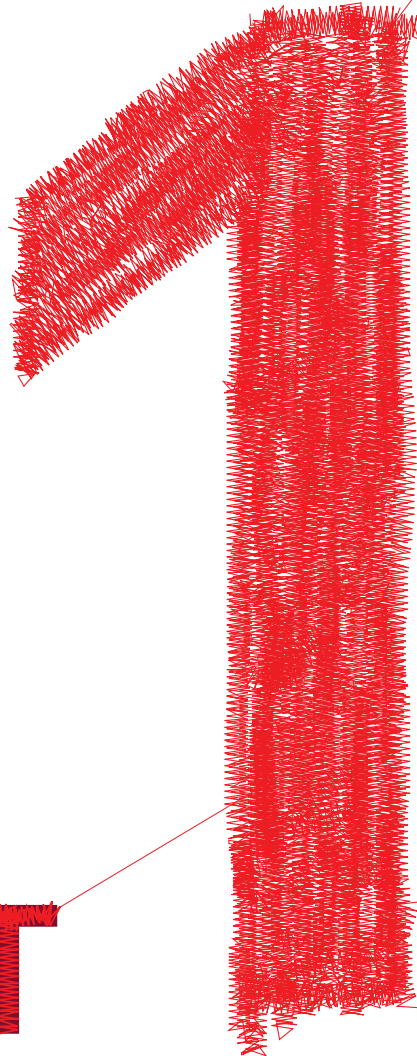
Guide to

FIRE RECOVERY



**CANADIAN
RED CROSS**

Residential property fires account for 40% of all fires in Canada. Fires usually occur without notice, and most often during the colder months of the year. This guide provides information on what to do after you have experienced a fire in your home.



BEFORE YOU START

Here are some basic steps you may want to take

If you cannot stay in your home due to fire damage, you will need to find temporary housing for your family and any pets. For help, contact your local government office.

In a disaster, families may become separated or loved ones outside the disaster area may be trying to reach you. If you are looking for a family member, contact your local Red Cross office.

Contact your insurance company and let them know what has happened. They will want to know a record of damage to your home and belongings and may request photos or video.

If you have been affected by a house fire, you may be eligible for government disaster financial assistance. Check with your local authorities for more information related to available assistance programs.

Before entering your home

You will not be allowed to re-enter your home after a fire if the building inspector judges the building to be unsafe. If a fire investigation is being done, you must get permission from the Fire Inspector before re-entering. A firefighter may escort you to ensure your safety.

Protect yourself by dressing properly, including rubber boots or sturdy boots, safety glasses, hard hat, rubber gloves and a dust mask.

Here is a list of recommended items that will help you in the recovery process:

Camera or video camera

Notebook and pen to record damage

Buckets, mops and sponges

All-purpose cleaner or unscented detergent

Large containers for soaking bedding and clothing, and lines to hang them to dry

Flashlight

First aid kit

Tools (hammer, pliers)

Trash bags

Face mask to protect yourself from smoke fumes that may still be in your home

Drinking Water

The Red Cross recommends that you have 4 litres of bottled water per person, per day in your emergency preparedness kit.

For more information on preparing a kit, visit redcross.ca/prepare

ENTERING YOUR HOME AND CLEANING UP

The Fire Department may have taken care of any gas or electrical hazards. Check with them before you enter. Regardless, you should still use extreme caution as you enter your home. Stay away from fallen, damaged or sparking electrical wires. If you see any of these, alert the fire department right away. It's also your responsibility to make sure the house is secured against further damage. If you rent, the landlord or property manager should do this. If you own the home, you should board up broken windows and smashed doors, and cover holes in walls and in the roof. You can also call a contractor to do this. See the Yellow Pages under "Contractors – General" or "Fire & Water Damage Restoration."

Important documents to recover

Be careful: If your documents are located in a safe, do not attempt to open it until the outside is cool to the touch.

ITEM DESTROYED OR MISSING	WHO TO CONTACT FOR REPLACEMENT
Animal registration papers	Municipal office
Bank books	Bank branch
Birth certificates – Marriage certificates – Death certificates	Provincial/Territorial Registrar General or Ministry of Vital Statistics
Bonds (completely destroyed)	Write to: Canada Savings Bonds P.O. Box 2770, Station D Ottawa, ON K1P 1J7 Include names and addresses that appeared on bonds, approximate date when purchased, and denominations. Gather all pieces and ashes and keep them for further reference.
Bonds (partially destroyed)	Gather up remaining pieces and ashes, put them in a package and write a letter explaining what happened. Send to Canada Savings Bond address (above).
Children's Services and Social Assistance identification cards, medical assistance or social assistance cheques	Your case worker
Citizenship papers	Citizenship & Immigration Canada
Credit cards	Issuing credit card company
Divorce papers	Supreme Court where decree was filed or divorce lawyer
Driver's licences and vehicle registration title cards	Provincial/Territorial transportation ministry
Income tax records	Revenue Canada
Insurance policies	Insurance agent
Land titles	Local provincial/territorial land title office
Medical records	Family doctor or specialist
Military discharge papers	Veterans Affairs Canada
Money (partially or completely destroyed)	Nearest Bank of Canada branch
Passports	Passport Canada
Provincial/Territorial health insurance card	Provincial/Territorial health ministry
Social Insurance Number (SIN) cards – Canada Pension Plan documents – Employment Insurance documents	Service Canada
Stocks	Issuing company or lawyer
Titles to deeds	City hall or local municipal office
Wills	Family lawyer or estate lawyer

If you are insured, contact your insurance company. Your policy may cover house cleaning by a restoration specialist. As you go through your possessions, keep ruined furniture, appliances, books, etc. for insurance purposes. You can put them outside or in a shed temporarily.

Household items often take several cleanings to rid them of smoke odours, soot and stains. In some cases, they will never come clean or lose their smell. If you can, consult a restoration specialist to help you determine what is worth saving and what isn't.

Hazardous materials

Contact your municipality or provincial ministry to find out how to dispose of hazardous materials such as solvents, garden chemicals and home cleaning products that have been soaked or that show signs of water damage.

Perishable foods, foods packaged in cardboard or plastic, or any foods or medicines directly exposed to heat, smoke, fumes or water should be discarded. Discard all food in glass jars, as there is a high chance that the seal was broken by exposure to heat.

Similarly with food in metal cans, the integrity of the can may have been affected by exposure to heat.

Smoke, odours & soot

Try placing small saucers of vinegar, vanilla or activated charcoal around the house to absorb odours. Smoke odours can last a long time. You will probably need to clean everything in the house several times. If you can't remove the smoke odour, contact a professional. You'll find listings under "Fire & Water Damage Restoration" in the Yellow Pages.

CLEANING UP

Heating, appliances and utilities

(Please check the Yellow Pages or phonebook to find the professionals listed below.)

Do not use appliances, electrical outlets, switch boxes or fuse-breaker panels until they have been checked by a qualified electrician.

Have your central heating system checked by a qualified technician before use. Replace any parts that have been damaged or affected by smoke.

Replace filters and insulation inside furnaces, air conditioners, water heaters, refrigerators and freezers if they have been damaged. You may need to consider replacing the whole appliance, depending on the severity of the damage.



Consult with a professional electrician or with the manufacturer.

Contact the appropriate utility or service company to have your service restored (i.e. electricity, gas, cable, phone, etc.) when you are ready to return home.

Floors and walls

Vacuum all surfaces with vacuums, including carpets and rugs.

Seal off the room you are working in with plastic sheeting to keep soot from travelling throughout the home.

Consult a professional painter for advice on how to clean your walls. You may need to re-paint with a specially formulated paint.

Furniture

Remove residual mud and soil from furniture and dry it off.

If you suspect any mould on any furniture that has been wet, contact a professional for advice. Check the Yellow Pages or phonebook for listings.

Consult a furniture restoration professional to see if any upholstered furniture can be salvaged. Check the Yellow Pages or phonebook for listings.

You may need to replace furniture entirely if it has been severely damaged by fire.

Scrub wooden surfaces (furniture, kitchen cabinets, railings, etc.) with a stiff brush and a cleaning solution such as Murphy's Oil Soap.

Get professional advice for cleaning antiques and fine reproductions.

Dispose of all medicines, cosmetics and toiletries that have been exposed to smoke or extreme heat.

Dispose of the following items if they have been exposed to smoke, soot or heat from the fire.

Contents of the freezer or fridge including all meat and produce (fresh or frozen)

All boxed foods

All bottled drinks and products in jars (the seal may have been damaged by extreme heat)

Cans with large dents or with any external damage



Clothing

If affected by the fire, use your washer and dryer only once they have been checked by a qualified electrician.

Scrape all heavy dirt from clothes, rinse and wash several times with detergent and dry immediately to prevent mould from forming.

Mattresses and pillows

Mattresses and pillows are usually not worth saving. If you must use a mattress temporarily, let it dry in the sun and then cover it with plastic sheeting.

Books, photographs and papers

Most photographs can be air-dried, face up. If they were frozen, thaw and then air-dry photos.

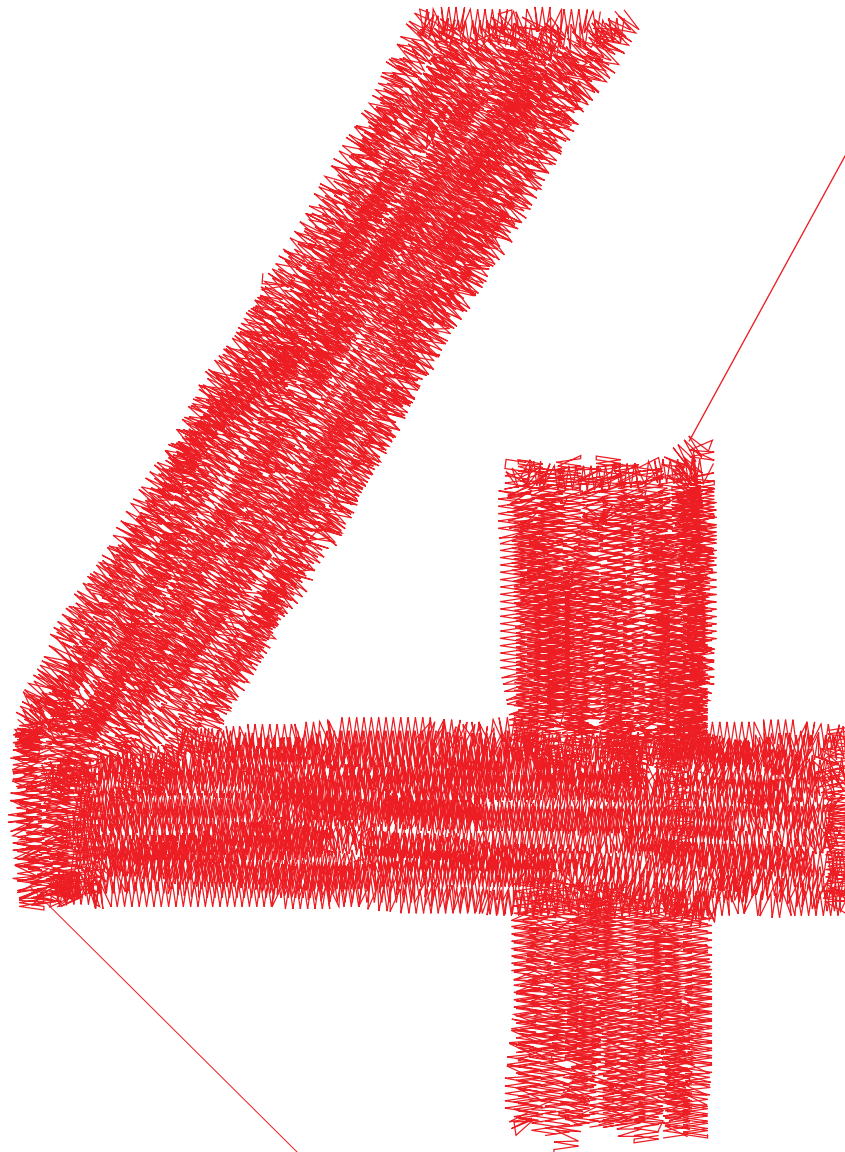
To salvage important documents, put them in the freezer immediately. Later, allow them to thaw and lift off each page as it thaws. Consult your lawyer to determine if the actual documents are important to save, or just the information on the documents.

For advice on salvaging books, photographs or paintings damaged by fire, contact the Canadian Conservation Institute toll free at **1-866-998-3721**.

FOOD AND MEDICINE

You will need to provide a list of lost or damaged items as part of your insurance claim. Review your insurance policy so you understand what items to list. If you had a household inventory before the fire, retrieve it for the insurance adjuster. If you didn't, or if it was destroyed, ask your insurance agent for a blank inventory form; it will jog your memory. Record serial numbers of appliances and household equipment, if possible. Note the approximate cost or value of each item. If possible, take close-up photos or video footage of damaged rooms, furnishings and property.

Once the inventory is complete, contact your insurance company for details on how to submit it to them. Keep all receipts related to living expenses and repairs, permits, inspection forms and any other papers in one place. Your insurance company may request them.



TAKE AN INVENTORY

Notify your bank or mortgage company

You have a responsibility to tell your mortgage company about the fire and to keep them informed about what is being done to restore the property. They may have forms for you to fill out, and they may want to inspect the property.

For more information on cleaning up after a fire, please refer to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's website or visit the following link:

What to do after a Fire: cmhc.ca/en/co/maho/em/em_003.cfm



Long-term recovery after a fire

Consider hiring a contractor or fire restoration specialist. Professional companies can help you with cleaning and repairing your home. If you are making an insurance claim, your insurance adjuster may help you find a contractor. Look in the Yellow Pages under “Contractors - General” or “Fire & Water Damage Restoration.”

Arrange for necessary inspections and building permits. Contact your municipal housing office to find out what steps you need to take to submit plans for rebuilding your home and to get required building permits.

Before moving back into your home

Ensure that the water supply has been inspected and officially declared safe for use, that every room that was affected by the fire has been cleaned, disinfected and dried, that all affected dishes, utensils and glasses have been thoroughly washed and disinfected and that adequate toilet facilities are available.

Now that you are on your way to recovering from this fire, don't forget to start preparing yourself and your family in case another one comes along.

For information on preparing your family and pets for disasters, visit redcross.ca/prepare

PLANNING FOR DISASTER

THE CANADIAN RED CROSS SOCIETY

Western Canada

100, 1305-11th Avenue SW
Calgary, AB T3C 3P6
(403) 541-6100

Ontario

5700 Cancross Court
Mississauga, Ontario L5R 3E9
(905) 890-1000

Quebec

6, Place du Commerce
Verdun, Quebec H3E 1P4
(514) 362-2930

Atlantic Canada

133 Troop Avenue
Dartmouth, NS B3B 2A7
(902) 423-3680

National Office

170 Metcalfe Street, Suite 300
Ottawa, Ontario K2P 2P2
(613) 740-1900

Acknowledgements

The Canadian Red Cross gratefully acknowledges the following publications:

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