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

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.
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITEM DESTROYED OR MISSING</th>
<th>WHO TO CONTACT FOR REPLACEMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Animal registration papers</td>
<td>Municipal office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank books</td>
<td>Bank branch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth certificates – Marriage certificates – Death certificates</td>
<td>Provincial/Territorial Registrar General or Ministry of Vital Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonds (completely destroyed)</td>
<td>Write to: Canada Savings Bonds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P.O. Box 2770, Station D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ottawa, ON K1P 1J7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonds (partially destroyed)</td>
<td>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).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children's Services and Social Assistance identification cards, medical assistance or social assistance cheques</td>
<td>Your case worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizenship papers</td>
<td>Citizenship &amp; Immigration Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credit cards</td>
<td>Issuing credit card company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorce papers</td>
<td>Supreme Court where decree was filed or divorce lawyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driver's licences and vehicle registration title cards</td>
<td>Provincial/Territorial transportation ministry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income tax records</td>
<td>Revenue Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance policies</td>
<td>Insurance agent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land titles</td>
<td>Local provincial/territorial land title office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical records</td>
<td>Family doctor or specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military discharge papers</td>
<td>Veterans Affairs Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money (partially or completely destroyed)</td>
<td>Nearest Bank of Canada branch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passports</td>
<td>Passport Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial/Territorial health insurance card</td>
<td>Provincial/Territorial health ministry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Insurance Number (SIN) cards – Canada Pension Plan documents – Employment Insurance documents</td>
<td>Service Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stocks</td>
<td>Issuing company or lawyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Titles to deeds</td>
<td>City hall or local municipal office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wills</td>
<td>Family lawyer or estate lawyer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.

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.
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.

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
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

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.
Acknowledgements
The Canadian Red Cross gratefully acknowledges the following publications:

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