

## RETURNING TO YOUR HOME OR BUSINESS AFTER A FIRE

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 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.

The 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 the heat and smoke. Cleanup will take time and patience.

Food facilities need to seek Environmental Health Services prior to reopening your facility. Contact Environmental Health at (805)654-2813.

### USE CAUTION!

- Wear sturdy shoes (steel toes and shanks are recommended) 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**.
- 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 may contain things that could make you sick.

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.**
- 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. In addition, the exploratory behavior of children may result in direct contact with contaminated materials.
- 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. Follow these steps to make sure you 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.

\* A temporary hand washing station can be created by using a large water jug that contains clean water.

Washing hands with soap and water is the best way to reduce the number of germs on them. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers can quickly reduce the number of germs on hands in some situations, but sanitizers **DO NOT** eliminate all types of germs.

## **IF RETURNING TO INHABIT YOUR HOME/BUSINESS**

Please use caution and follow guidance provided about in addition to the following:

### **Food Safety**

Foods exposed to fire can be compromised!

- Food in cans or jars may appear to be okay, but if they've 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.
- One of the most dangerous elements of a fire is sometimes not the fire itself, but TOXIC FUMES released from burning materials. 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 the fumes.
- Food stored in refrigerators or freezers can also become contaminated by fumes. The refrigerator seal isn't airtight, and fumes can get inside.
- Chemicals used to fight fires contain toxic materials and can contaminate food and cookware.

- Foods that are exposed to chemicals should be thrown away. This includes food stored at room temperature, such as fruits and vegetables, as well as foods stored in permeable containers like cardboard and screw-topped jars and bottles.

**Reheating food that has become contaminated will not make it safe!**

**When in doubt, throw it out!**

### **Cleaning and Sanitizing**

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

Clean and sanitize surfaces in a four-step process:

1. Wash with soap and hot, clean water.
2. Rinse with clean water.
3. 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.
4. 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.

### **Smoke, Water, Ash, and Debris Management**

Seek professional damage and debris removal/restoration services.