

After the Fire Is Out

What do we do now that the Firefighters have gone?

We have extinguished your fire, but that's only part of the job. We've made sure the fire is completely out and done some basic clean up work. It is now up to you to repair the fire damage and replace damaged items. We hope the following tips will help. First, we should answer some questions you might have about our operations.

Why are there broken windows or holes in the roof?

As a fire burns, it moves upward, then outward. If the fire hasn't already damaged the windows or the roof, we may need to remove windows and/or cut holes in the roof to "ventilate". This stops the damaging outward movement of the fire and enables us to fight the fire more efficiently, resulting in less damage in the long run.

Why are there holes in the walls?

We have to be sure, absolutely sure, that the entire fire is out, and there is no "hidden" fire inside walls and partitions.

If you have other questions about our operations or your fire, please don't hesitate to call the Harrisburg Fire Department at 995-6412 for more information.

Get your family settled.

The policy of the Harrisburg Fire Department is to contact the Red Cross in your behalf. The Red Cross will assist you in finding temporary housing after the fire. If they have not contacted you when we leave, let us know.

If the house is un-inhabitable, and you cannot find a place to stay with family or friends (keeping in mind that it may be for several weeks to several months), arrange to rent living space. Notify your insurance agent of your temporary address and phone number so an adjuster knows where to find you. Some insurance policies pay additional living expenses up to a specific dollar amount (usually 10% to 20% of the coverage on the dwellings). Consult with the adjusters.

Protect yourself and your property.

One of the first things to do after a fire is to protect yourself from additional losses. If you have to stay elsewhere, remove valuables from your home. However, you need to contact the fire investigation officer before removing any items from the dwelling if the fire department is investigating the fire. Also, before you enter the dwelling after a fire, be sure it is safe to enter. Check with the fire department or with a building inspector or contractor about the possibility of building collapse. If you enter a damaged dwelling at night, be sure there is sufficient light to prevent you from walking into or falling over something.

Whether you own or rent, protect any salvageable items from further damage from weather or theft. Under many insurance policies, you must take reasonable care to protect your remaining property in order for the policy to remain in effect. If you own the property, board up any broken windows or doors and cover any holes in the roof with plywood, tarps or plastic. If you are renting, the owner should probably do this for you, depending on your rental agreement.

The owner can be held liable for injuries caused by broken glass or unsafe conditions. If the weather is cold, have all the plumbing shut off and drained. Contact the utility company and have all appliances such as the range, water heater and furnace checked for safety. Contact a reputable electrician to have all affected electrical equipment and wiring checked for safety and serviceability before re-energizing.

Make a damage inventory

Itemize everything that has been damaged, room by room, and submit as part of your "proof of loss" requirement. List even the most insignificant items. **DO NOT THROW ANYTHING OUT UNTIL YOU HAVE AGREED ON A SETTLEMENT.** Be as detailed and accurate as you can with your inventory. Cite when you bought the item, what it cost and what it will cost to replace. Contents are subject to depreciation unless there is a replacement/cost endorsement. Under many homeowner policies, you are entitled to full replacement for

structural damage up to the coverage of your policy, provided your policy was for at least 80% of the replacement value of your home. The company will send a contractor to estimate the repair costs for your home. It would be advisable to have some damage idea before you receive the insurance company's offer. Don't hire a contractor until you have checked his credentials. Contact the Building Department for information. Get everything in writing before any work is begun. Try to get a specific completion date with assurance that any additional living expenses beyond this date will be covered if the job is delayed. If your property is not insured or if your insurance will not cover all your losses, contact your family tax consultant or the Internal Revenue Service for information on tax deduction status.

Should I pay my mortgage?

Be sure to keep up your mortgage payments after the fire unless the lender agrees (in writing) to some other arrangement. If you are a renter, check your lease agreement to determine the landlord's obligation to provide you with living space.

When will I receive the insurance payment?

The insurance company will send a check once you have agreed upon the amount and signed the agreement offer. If extensive home repairs must be made, the insurance company may withhold a portion of the settlement until the specific construction is completed. If your home is mortgaged, the settlement check for structural repairs may be made payable to both you and the lender. Often the lender will sign the check over to you outright, but be sure to consult with the lender about this.

Important Papers

Documents and Records

Here's a checklist of documents you will need to replace if they have been destroyed.

Birth Certificates	Drivers' Licenses	Bank Books
Insurance Policies	Passports	Military Discharge
Social Security	Marriage & Divorce	Credit Cards
Title to Deeds	Stocks & Bonds	Medical Records
Warranties	Income Tax Records	Auto Registration
Auto Titles	Citizenship Papers	Animal Registration
Prepaid Burial Contracts		

Attempt to recover important papers, notify schools if children are involved, notify the post office to hold mail until change of address is available, cancel all deliveries such as milk and the newspaper.

Copies of birth certificates (since 1903), marriage certificates (since 1906), divorce decrees (since 1925), and death certificates (since 1903) are available at the following address:

Office of the State Health Officer
Vital Statistics Section
979 State Office Building
Portland, Oregon 97201

If any of these certificates were issued outside the State of Oregon, contact the officer of the State/County in which it was issued.

For copies of destroyed military papers, veterans should contact the local Veterans Administration. Your local Red Cross disaster caseworker can offer a great deal of assistance in this area.

If your Social Security card, Medicare cards or Social Security check was destroyed, contact your nearest Social Security Office as soon as possible.

If you cannot find your checkbook, blank checks or savings account book after the fire, notify your bank immediately. Ask them to close your accounts and transfer the funds to new account numbers. You'll have to give them an address where they can mail your new checks or savings book, or you will have to make arrangements to pick them up at the bank. It is important to notify the bank as quickly as possible. The same goes for credit cards. Call the company immediately. Have them close the account and issue a new card with a different number. Follow up a phone call with a letter as soon as possible.

Destroyed Currency and Savings Bonds

Handle burned money as little as possible. Attempt to encase each bill or portion of a bill in plastic wrap for preservation. If half or more of the bill is intact, you can take the remainder to your Federal Reserve Bank for replacement. Ask your personal bank for the nearest Federal Reserve Bank. Or you can mail the burned or torn money via FIRST CLASS REGISTERED MAIL TO:

U.S. Treasury Department
Main Treasury Building, Room 1123
Washington, D.C. 20220

Mutilated or melted coins can be taken to the Federal Reserve Bank, or mailed via FIRST CLASS REGISTERED MAIL to:

Superintendent, U.S. Assay Office
32 Old Slip
New York, NY 10005

If your U.S. Savings Bonds have been mutilated or destroyed, write to:

U.S. Treasury Department
Bureau of Public Debt
Division of Loans and Currency
5337 South Clark Street
Chicago, IL 60605
Attn: Bond Consultant

Include name(s) and address(es) on bonds, approximate date and time period when purchased, denominations and approximate number of each.

Stock Certificates

You must file for the lost certificate. Any stockbroker has the form. You must show evidence of the purchase. The broker from whom you bought the stock would have such evidence. You will have to post a surety bond. After 6 months, the old certificate is invalidated and a new one issued.

Cleaning

Pillows (Fiberfill)

Brush off surface dirt. Wash by hand in warm water and low sudsing detergent. Flush water through pillow by compressing it. Change water if necessary. Twisting and wringing will tear filling. Rinse three times in clear, warm water. Put in automatic machine and spin off water; dry in tumble-type dryer; or, press out as much water as possible by hand and hang on line outdoors to dry. Change hanging position from time to time.

Pillows (Foam Rubber)

Remove cover and brush off surface dirt. Follow manufacturer's directions, if available. Otherwise, soak in cool water, then wash in warm suds by hand or in machine with gentle agitation. Rinse well. Gently squeeze or spin out excess water; blot with towels. Dry away from heat. Do not dry in dryer even though air-drying is very slow. Wash and iron the cover. Do not replace the cover until pillow is completely dry.

Pillows (Feather)

Brush off surface dirt. If the pillow is not badly soiled, wash ticking and feathers together. To circulate water through pillows, open 2 opposite seams of ticking 2 inches, turn edges in and fasten with safety pins. Wash pillows in machine or by hand in warm suds 15 to 20 minutes. Do not wash more than 2 pillows at a time. Rinse at least 3 times in clear, warm water. Spin off water or gently squeeze out as much water as possible. Dry in automatic dryer at moderate heat setting or in warm room with fan to move air or on clotheslines.

Blankets

Shake and brush to remove surface dirt. Use manufacturer's directions, if available. Otherwise, soak blanket without agitation in lukewarm detergent suds for 15 minutes. Turn it two or three times by hand during soak period. Spin until water is drained off. If necessary, soak again in clean suds water. Rinse two or three times in lukewarm water. Soak each time for five minutes, turning once or twice by hand. Extract water each

time as described above. Hang blanket over two parallel lines or dry in a pre-heated dryer with five or six bath towels. Mix hot towels into blankets and dry 15 to 18 minutes. Remove blankets while still damp. Gently stretch blanket and hang over two lines to dry.

Electric Blankets

Use manufacturer's directions, if possible. Cover plug with heavy cloth. Follow washing directions above. DO NOT dry in dryer unless manufacturer's directions specify. Squeeze down length of blanket and hang over two lines to dry. The blankets should NOT be plugged in until absolutely dry.

Mattresses

A company that builds and repairs mattresses probably can renovate a good innerspring mattress. Reconditioning a mattress is too difficult to do at home. If the mattress must be used temporarily, scrape off the surface dirt and expose mattress to sunlight to dry as much as possible.

Dry Cleaning

Dry cleaners have chemicals to treat soot and water damage and smoke odors. Get the clothing to the cleaner as soon as possible. If you are delayed, if possible, remove shoulder pads or trimming that might bleed; soak for a short period in cold water with a small amount of synthetic detergent. Do not soak too long. Rinse in cold water; gently squeeze out water; shake to avoid wrinkling and fasten to a hanger to dry completely in cold air. Then shake or brush off as much dirt as possible.

Floors

When floors are buckling badly, take up trim board and remove one board along the edge of the floor. As soon as the floor starts to dry, the wood will shrink and pressure will decrease.

Walls

Do not paint until the walls are thoroughly dry. Wash down the walls while still wet. Use a mild soap or synthetic detergent. Plaster or stucco walls can be repaired while still damp. Consult a local paint dealer for instructions. Repaste edges, sections or loosened wallpaper using a commercially prepared paste. To clean, use a purchased putty-like cleaner. Wash washable wallpaper in the same manner as painted wall. Work quickly so paper does not become soaked. Work from the bottom to the top to prevent streaking.

Wood Furniture

Take all wood furniture outdoors and remove as many drawers, slides and working parts as possible. Do not force drawers from the front with screwdriver or chisel. If necessary, remove the back of the piece and push out the drawers. Clean off dirt using a hose stream if necessary. Wash surfaces with a cloth wrung from warm mild suds. Wipe with cloth wrung from clear water, then with a dry cloth. Store the pieces indoors where they will dry slowly. Do not leave them in the sun because they will warp and twist. Furniture that has not been submerged still may develop white spots or whitish film from dampness. If the whole surface is affected, rub it with a cloth wrung from a mixture of ½ cup household ammonia and ½ cup water and wipe dry at once; or rub the surface with a steel wool pad dipped in liquid polishing wax, wipe with a soft cloth, then buff. To treat individual white spots or small areas, rub gently with a cloth moistened with camphorated oil or oil of peppermint. Wipe off oil and buff dry. A drop of ammonia on a damp cloth may do the job; or moisten cigarette ashes or rottenstone with sewing machine oil; apply to spots and rub lightly with finger. Wipe surface and buff dry. If these methods are not effective, it may be necessary to refinish the furniture.

Upholstered Furniture

Dry the furniture quickly to prevent mildew and rotting. Brush off as much dirt as possible. If necessary, shampoo the upholstery. Shampooing: If not using a commercial upholstery shampoo, use stiff suds of ¼ cup sudsing detergent powder (not a liquid) and 1 quart hot water. Apply suds (not water) with sponge or soft brush. Work on a small section at a time and overlap sections. Remove foam with sponge or cloth wrung from clear water. Blot sections with clean, dry towel. Repeat on other sections. Change shampoo solution as it becomes dirty. Brush pile fabric in one direction. When fabric is completely dry, vacuum or brush to remove any shampoo residue. If upholstery is mildewed, brush to remove as much as possible. Wipe with a cloth wrung from

a solution of 1 cup denatured alcohol and 1 cup water. To remove mildew in padding, have the piece of furniture thoroughly dried and fumigated in a fumigating plant.

Leather

Remove surface dirt from leather; wash in cold water; wipe with a dry cloth. Stuff purses and shoes with crushed paper to retain shape. Leave suitcases open. Dry leather in normal air away from heat and sun. When dry, clean with saddle soap. Neat's foot oil may be used on shoes that have become stiff. It causes leather to darken but softens it. Rinse leather and suede jackets in cold water. Dry away from heat.

Smoke Odor

To remove smoke odor or soot from washable clothing (except those which should not be bleached) try this formula:

4 to 6 cups tri-sodium phosphate

1 cup Lysol

1 gallon water

Rinse with clean water and dry thoroughly.

This formula can be used for most walls, furniture or floors, but you may want to test the formula on a small portion to insure that it will not damage a particular fabric or material. Caution should be taken when using these cleaning solutions. Wear rubber gloves.

Other Information

Perishables

Any food, beverages and/or medicines exposed to heat or smoke should not be consumed. If the materials were in tightly closed or sealed containers or in airtight refrigerators or freezers, they may be salvageable. Consult with your local health representative. It is cheaper to replace the material than to jeopardize your health by taking a chance.

Finally, the Firefighter

If you have been pleased by your firefighters' helpfulness and professionalism, or if you just want to say "Thanks", by all means do so, especially in writing. Many times a letter to the editor of your newspaper in praise of your firefighters is worth its weight in gold. Most fire companies depend on public support to continue to operate and provide this valuable service. Your acknowledgement is invaluable in continuing this support.

If you have concerns about our operations or fire suppression, please contact us. We will be able to give further information for any of your questions.

Harrisburg Fire & Rescue

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995-6412