

BE DILIGENT LOOKING FOR HIDDEN

Many homeowners may wonder when they can safely re-enter a property after a wildfire and how to resolve issues that could harm themselves or family members.

There are a number of safety precautions to consider before re-entering a property burned by wildfire.

Landscape Safety

- Visually inspect for stability any standing trees that remain. Trees weakened by fire are serious hazards and could fall at any moment in any direction. Walking through such sites poses serious risks, especially in windy areas. Keep in mind that wind patterns on a property may have changed due to the loss of adjacent tree cover. Check for burnt roots by probing the base of trees with a rod. If roots have been burned, trees should be considered very unstable and may fall over at any time.
- Watch for ash pits when walking around property scorched by fire. An ash pit is a hole of hot ashes left behind by tree stumps and root systems that have burned underground. Ash pits can stay hot for many days after a wildfire and cause serious burns. Mark their locations.
- Remember, hot spots in a burned landscape could flare up without warning and start new fires.

Livestock and Pet Safety

- Inspect areas where animals roam since there may be hidden embers, hot spots, and ash pits that might burn hooves and paws

or break limbs.

- Do not tie animals to burned trees or structures.
- Be vigilant about checking any animals that may have been exposed to smoke inhalation during a fire. Smoke-related pneumonia is the most common cause of fire-related death in animals.
- Consult a veterinarian for treatment of any burns suffered by animals.

Building Safety

- Only enter buildings that have been inspected by local fire authorities and have passed inspection.



Ash pits, 'widow-makers,' chemicals — be careful

DANGERS ON PROPERTY FOLLOWING FIRE

- Be on the lookout for structural damage. Roofs and floors damaged by fire can collapse without warning.
- Frequently check the entire structure for embers and smoke, particularly the roof, attic, and crawl space of a house for several days after re-entry.
- Once you have ensured there are no gas leaks or damage to electrical lines, contact local utilities (water, natural gas, propane, electricity) to restore service. Local suppliers will often come to a property to inspect their systems before reconnections occur.
- Remember to contact your insurance company before beginning any cleanup procedures. A complete inventory of damaged goods needs to be taken before insurance claims can be made.

Personal Safety During Cleanup

- Wet down debris before the cleanup to reduce the risk of inhaling ash and dust particles.
- Wear a protective mask of at least an N-95 or P-100 rating. Debris from burned buildings may contain toxic substances such as asbestos, arsenic, and lead, which can be easily inhaled along with small dust and ash particles.
- Avoid activity that stirs up ash, such as the use of leaf blowers. Instead, gently sweep surfaces or use a wet cloth or mop.
- Wear a hardhat, goggles, leather or rubber gloves, heavy-soled boots, long sleeves, and pants.



- Get a tetanus shot booster if you have not had one in the past 10 years. There is a risk of obtaining puncture wounds, cuts, and burns from the cleanup of broken glass, exposed wires, nails, wood, metal, plastic, and other potentially hazardous debris.
- If a home was damaged in a fire, water wells may have become contaminated with bacteria due to a loss of water pressure. Water from wells should be sent to a laboratory for testing before it is consumed. (See "Drinking water and septic systems" on page 18 for more information on testing and decontaminating wells.)
- If a municipal water source is used, request that a routine three-month bacteria water sample be collected and tested before consumption.

Food and Water Safety

- Throw away food that may have thawed, spoiled, or come in contact with harmful materials, such as fire retardant or ash, or has been exposed to heat and smoke.
- Do not use water that may be contaminated to wash dishes, brush teeth, prepare food, wash hands, or make ice. Until water can be confirmed as safe to drink, use bottled water or boil water to ensure it has been properly disinfected.

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