

Guide to Wildfire Evacuation Re-Entry

EMO  **EMERGENCY
MANAGEMENT
ORGANIZATION**

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Introduction

Following an evacuation, there are several things you may want to consider when you're allowed to return home. This guide provides some tips and suggestions for the next steps in your journey to return home.

The Local Authority will provide information on when your community will be considered safe. Please do not return to your communities until your local authority have given permission to do so.

Before You Start

Anticipate what it will be like

The physical environment:

It helps to think ahead about what the environment will look, feel, and smell like when you return. There may be delays in returning home due to the area being unsafe, and your community may have dramatically changed, including:

- Blackened landscapes.
- Burnt out buildings and vehicles.
- Smell of smoke.
- Areas covered in ash.
- Road signs, and familiar landmarks missing.
- Spoiled food in fridges and freezers.
- Signs painted on remaining houses.

Preparing to return to your home and community:

When it is safe to return, think about:

- Are the roads open and safe? Do you know what route to use to get to your home?
- Do you have fuel, food, and water? There may be limited amounts available to you in your community.
- Are your cell phones charged? There may be interruptions or power outages in your community.
- Do you have a radio, a flashlight, and an emergency kit?
- Do you have appropriate clothing? This includes boots with heavy soles, thick rubber gloves, a hat, long pants, and a long-sleeved shirt.
- If you anticipate clean-up, do you have personal protective equipment, including masks? Do you know where to get these items?
- Do you have all medications that you will need?
- Will you take your children and pets on the first visit?

Preparing to Return Home

If you cannot live in your home:

- Do not enter the area where your home is located unless officials say it is safe to do so.
- Use caution if entering the burned area as hazards may still exist.

- Recognize that there may be many tasks associated with relocating and resettling your family. Take small steps.
- Get your family settled – if your home is unlivable, you may want to arrange temporary housing.
- Take care of your pets – if possible, take your pets with you and ensure they have plenty of food and water. Ask your vet for some options to board your animals if you cannot take them with you.
- Notify people of your temporary address. Give your new address to your employer, family/friends, post office, bank, school, credit cards, utility companies, and insurance companies.

If there is no apparent damage to your home:

- Do not enter your home until officials say it is safe to do so.
- If you are unsure if it is safe, ASK! Reach out to your local authority as they are there to help you.
- Use caution when entering burned areas as hazards may still exist, including hot spots.
- Establish what you need to do FIRST. Take small steps at a time: check the status of your power, water, gas, phone, and sewer. You may need to call utility services for assistance.
- Once you are feeling settled, consider reaching out to your neighbours. It is important to re-establish relationships and lend a helping hand to one another.

Important documents to recover

Items destroyed or missing	Who to contact for replacement
Animal registration papers	Municipal office
Bank books	Bank branch
Birth certificates/marriage certificates/death certificates/status cards	Vital Statistics
Children's Services and Social Assistance identification cards, medical assistance, or social assistance cheques	Your case worker
Credit cards	Issuing credit card company
Divorce papers	Court where divorce was filed or divorce lawyer
Driver's licences and vehicle registration title cards	Manitoba Public Insurance
Income tax records	Revenue Canada
Insurance policies	Insurance agent
Land titles	Land title office
Medical records	Family doctor or specialist
Military discharge papers	Veterans Affairs Canada
Money	Nearest bank branch
Passports	Service Canada or Consulate General
Provincial health card	Manitoba Health
Social Insurance Number (SIN) cards/ Canada Pension Plan documents/ Employment Insurance documents	Service Canada
Titles to deeds	Local municipal office
Wills	Family lawyer or estate lawyer

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.

Ensure your home is secured against further damage. Check for damaged trees or external buildings that may have become unstable. 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 may also want to call a contractor to do this.

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.
- Flashlights.
- First aid kit.
- Tools such as a hammer, pliers, or screwdriver.
- Trash bags.
- Protective equipment: a two-strap dust particulate mask with nose clip (N-95), coveralls, both leather and rubber gloves, and sturdy boots.
- Drinking water.
- **Do NOT consume food left in the house or drink water from the tap until you know it is safe. Bring 4 litres of water per day per person and food that does not require cooking. Appliances may be unsafe to use.**

Inspecting your Home and Starting to Clean Up

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. You may want to consult a restoration specialist to help you determine what is worth saving and what isn't.

Hazardous materials

- Contact your local authority 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 may not be suitable for consumption.

Smoke, odours & soot

- You may want to try placing small saucers of vinegar or vanilla around the house to absorb odours.

Heating, appliances, and utilities

- Consider contacting a professional prior to using appliances, electrical outlets, switch boxes, or fuse breaker panels.
- Consider having your central heating system checked by a qualified technician before use.
- 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, if needed.

Floors and walls

- You may want to vacuum all surfaces, including carpets and rugs. Consider sealing off the room you are working in with plastic sheeting to keep soot from travelling throughout the home.
- Consider consulting 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, you may want to contact a professional for advice.
- You may want to consider cleaning surfaces (furniture, kitchen cabinets, railings, etc.) with a cleaning solution.
- You may want to get professional advice for cleaning antiques and fine reproductions.
- You may 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 may help to jog your memory.
- Record serial numbers of appliances and household equipment, if possible and note the approximate cost or value of each item.
- If possible, take close-up photos or video footage of damaged rooms, furnishings, and property.

Take an Inventory

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 should notify 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.

Basic Needs: Food, Water and Medicine

Water

- If affected by the fire, you may want to check with a qualified electrician before using your washer and dryer.
- Consider scraping all heavy dirt from clothes, rinse and wash several times with detergent and dry immediately to prevent mould from forming.
- Never use water you think may be contaminated to wash dishes, brush teeth, prepare food, wash hands, make ice, or prepare baby formula.

Medications

- You may want to dispose of all medicines, cosmetics, and toiletries that have been exposed to smoke or extreme heat.
- Medications that are required to be refrigerated should be safely disposed of and replaced to ensure they are still effective.
- Ensure you have enough medication (prescription and over the counter) to sustain you for two weeks.
- If you have concerns about accessing your medications you may want to consult with a pharmacist or a doctor.

Consider disposing 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.

Special Considerations

Taking care of yourself and others

It is normal to experience conflicting emotions when returning home. Allowing yourself to admit your feelings and expressing them to someone you trust will help you to cope. Try to anticipate what conditions you may be confronted with and how you may react. Thinking through this may help you feel more in control of the situation and less distressed.

Children have many different types of reactions to an evacuation. They may be coping well. They may become clingy or fearful, have aches and pains or nightmares. All of these responses are expected. Try to encourage your children to express their feelings and fears and continue to provide them with support as you move through this experience.

Special considerations for caregivers

For people who depend on caregivers, there may be debris on the streets that could prevent caregivers from being able to reach you. This could leave you isolated.

If you have a service animal, the animal also needs time and care to recover. They may be hurt or too frightened to work after an evacuation.

Other considerations

- Your usual access to health services, such as your family doctor, physiotherapist, home care, and other health supports may be limited.
- If you have a condition that requires a reliable electrical supply i.e., home dialysis, home oxygen, CPAP, or other assistive devices such as an electric bed or lift, or motorized wheelchair, please check to ensure that your devices can operate consistently.
- Your usual ways of getting groceries, medications, and supplies may be disrupted. It may take several days before stores reopen. You may not be able to readily replace even basic items related to your health, including hearing aid batteries and prescription medications.
- Ensure you have an adequate supply (minimum two weeks) of any other health supplies you may need. Access to these products may be limited or unavailable.
- Public transportation may not be working and routes and schedules may be changed. Public and private wheelchair transport services may not be operating.
- Roads may be damaged or blocked. Road signs may be down. Traffic lights and walking signals used to cross the street may not be working properly. This can disrupt cues used to cross the street. Travel time may be longer because of detours and added traffic.
- Landmarks may be changed or gone entirely; home may look, feel, and smell different.

Moving Beyond

The period after an evacuation can often feel overwhelming, lonely, and difficult. Some people find it helpful to:

1. Get back into a routine. It may look different from the one you had before, but familiar patterns of mealtimes, school or work, and bedtimes are important for adults as well as children.
2. Break tasks into small steps that are manageable and can be accomplished. Work through them one at a time.
3. Think about what you have achieved at the end of each day.