



# *After the Fire*

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*Information and Resources for  
Recovering from a Fire*





## **Important Information**

**Date of Fire:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Time of Fire:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Location of Fire:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Fire Incident Report Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Fire Marshal or Investigator:** \_\_\_\_\_

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## *Introduction*

### **Why are there holes in my roof? Why are the windows and doors broken?**

Fire produces temperatures of over 1,200 degrees, along with smoke and hot toxic gases. At times, it is necessary to reduce the heat, smoke and hot gases before firefighters can enter a building to put out a fire and rescue any occupants.

Venting the smoke and gases must be done quickly to speed the rescue effort, as well as to prevent the fire from spreading. Cutting holes in the roof or breaking windows helps with this task.

Often, walls must be forcibly opened to find “hidden” fires. The fire is not out until every “hot spot” is found.

After the fire is out, damage from fighting the fire may appear unnecessary, however, without the use of these firefighting and rescue techniques, lives could be lost and the building could suffer total destruction by fire.



## Can I re-enter my home? What if my house is uninhabitable?

Use caution in re-occupying your home. If it has been severely damaged or contaminated, you may need to find other housing. If you are covered by a homeowner's insurance policy, you may be eligible for temporary housing. Remember, save any receipts for money you spend related to your fire loss. Your insurance company will want copies in order to reimburse you. These receipts will also be useful for verifying losses claimed on your federal income tax.

Individuals who have experienced a fire or other disaster may obtain assistance from the local American Red Cross. Upon application to the Red Cross, you can obtain food, clothing, lodging and other services. Day or night, call **206-323-2345** and ask for Disaster Services. In addition to the Red Cross, there are other community agencies which may be able to help. Your Red Cross disaster caseworker can assist you in contacting appropriate agencies.

### **Be sure to notify the following:**

- ◆ Post Office of your new address
- ◆ Bank(s)
- ◆ Credit Card Companies
- ◆ City Light (electric)
- ◆ Seattle Public Utilities (water and garbage)
- ◆ Puget Sound Energy (gas)
- ◆ Social Security Administration (if necessary)
- ◆ Children's schools or childcare
- ◆ Seattle Police Department (if your home will be left vacant for any length of time)

## **Use Caution**

We know you are anxious to inspect the damage and, if possible, begin to recover your belongings. Please be aware that there may be unseen hazards present.

**Damage**—The building may have suffered structural damage and be physically unsafe to enter. Gas, electrical or plumbing may not be working.

**Toxins**—Smoke and sooty deposits may be present. Toxins may include gases produced in the fire, as well as particles such as asbestos fibers used in some building materials in older homes. Exposure to some of these toxins has been shown to increase the risk of developing certain types of cancer.

**Airborne Contaminants**—Some individuals may be especially sensitive to contaminants or sooty deposits which may be present after a fire. These include babies, small children, older persons, pregnant women and individuals with respiratory conditions.

## **Pets**

Pets often become upset and can react in unusual ways after a traumatic event. After a fire, it is best to leave pets with a family member, friend, veterinarian or boarding facility while you are cleaning up your home to avoid injury and further damage.

In most cases, it is safer and quicker to have your insurance agency handle the necessary clean up and renovation of your property. The agency can arrange repairs by skilled professionals who specialize in fire and water damage repairs. These individuals are aware of the possible hazards present and have the equipment to deal with them.

## **Construction**

If the building is structurally damaged to the point that it is not habitable, a building inspector must be called. After the building inspection, a permit must be obtained prior to making repairs. Building Inspection: **206-684-8900**.

## **Utilities**

The fire department may have the utility services shut off or disconnected as a safety precaution and also to prevent further damage to the structure and its contents. The procedures for re-establishing utility service are as follows:

**Electricity**—An electrical inspector must check wiring to be sure it is safe to reconnect power. Contact Seattle City Light for an inspection at **206-684-3000**. The 24-hour service number is **206-706-0051**. Remember, do not operate wet or damp appliances. Have a service person check them first. *Electricity and water do not mix!*

**Water**—Seattle Public Utilities service crews are available to restore your service at any time. The 24-hour service number is **206-386-1800**. Water service inspection may be requested by calling **206-684-3000** during normal business hours.

**Natural Gas**—**Do not** turn the gas back on. A Puget Sound Energy service person is available 24 hours a day to turn on the gas and re-light appliances for you. Just call **1-888-225-5773**.

**Telephone**—Contact your telephone company's business office.

## *After the Fire*

### **What You Need to Know**

After the fire department personnel leave, the building becomes your responsibility. If possible, the fire fighters will secure doors and windows. The final responsibility lies with the owner. Use caution and limit movement in the home to prevent soot and other fire debris from being embedded into upholstery, carpets, curtains and more.

### **Remove Your Valuables**

If it is safe to enter the building, remove all valuables. It is your responsibility to protect against further damage due to weather, theft or vandalism.

### **Contact Your Insurance Agent**

Do this as soon as possible. He or she must be notified of the fire and will be able to help you arrange for immediate repairs. If you cannot reach your agent or have no insurance, you may wish to obtain professional assistance for cleaning. Fire and water damage restoration firms are a good place to start.

### **Contact Your Manager**

If you are a tenant, contact the resident manager or the owner. It is the owner's responsibility to prevent further loss to the building.





## **Documents**

Below is a list of documents that should be located, if possible, to speed up the process of recovering from a disaster. NOTE: It is wise to store all important documents in a fireproof safe, container or cabinet.

- ◆ Birth Certificate
- ◆ Driver's License
- ◆ Bank Books and Documents
- ◆ Mortgage Papers
- ◆ Insurance Policies
- ◆ Military Discharge Papers
- ◆ Passports
- ◆ Social Security Cards
- ◆ Medicare Cards
- ◆ Marriage License
- ◆ Divorce Decree
- ◆ Credit Cards and Account Numbers
- ◆ Titles and Deeds (Home and Auto)
- ◆ Stocks and Bonds
- ◆ Senior Citizen ID Card
- ◆ Medicare Cards
- ◆ Wills
- ◆ Medical Records
- ◆ Warranties
- ◆ Income Tax Records
- ◆ Automobile Registrations
- ◆ Citizenship Paperwork
- ◆ Burial Contracts
- ◆ Pet Licenses/Animal Registrations
- ◆ Death Certificates
- ◆ DSHS ID Card\*

\*Public assistance clients should notify the DSHS office in your area if you ID card is damage or destroyed. Check the phone book or go online for the office nearest you.

## **Documents**

There are a number of different methods that can be used to dry wet documents. Air Drying, Dehumidifying, Freeze Drying and Vacuum Thermal Drying. Contact a document restoration company immediately for information about the best process in your specific situation.

## **Property and Income Tax Adjustments**

Property which is extensively damaged by fire may qualify for a reevaluation and reduction in your property tax assessment. Information and applications are available from the King County Assessor's Office, **206-263-2332** or [www.kingcounty.gov/depts/assessor/Contact-Us.aspx](http://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/assessor/Contact-Us.aspx).

Applications must be submitted within 75 days after the date of destruction or within the year in which the destruction occurs. File your application before rebuilding or repairing property. Copies of the fire report, insurance reports, contractor repair estimates and a photo should accompany your application.

## **Uninsured Property**

Uninsured loss of property, both real and personal, may entitle you to deductions in your income tax. Information is available from the local Internal Revenue Service office, **1-800-829-1040**. The Seattle office is located at 915 2nd Avenue.

## **Paper Money, Coins and Savings Bonds**

Check with any local commercial bank, the regional Federal Reserve Bank, contact the US Department of the Treasury Bureau of Engraving and Printing and/or the US Mint.

### **Paper Money**

[www.bep.gov/submitclaim.html](http://www.bep.gov/submitclaim.html)

1-866-575-2361

### **Coins**

United States Mint

1-800-USA-MINT (872-6468)

### **U.S. Savings Bonds**

Call 1-844-284-2676 (toll free) or email [SavBonds@bpd.treas.gov](mailto:SavBonds@bpd.treas.gov) to request a Form FS 1048 to replace destroyed bonds. If you don't know the serial numbers of the destroyed bonds, you will also need form FS 2490.



## **Books**

The main objective in air drying wet books is to remove water as efficiently as possible while also trying to prevent structural distortion.

**Books that are thoroughly wet**—Do not attempt to open the book, fan the pages and leaves or remove the covers. Place books in a closed position (with front and back cover slightly open) on its end on sheets of absorbent paper, prop up slightly to allow for proper drainage. Change the absorbent paper when it becomes saturated. If possible, place books in a moving current of air, so they can dry to a point where they are only partially wet and next steps can be taken.

**Books that are partially wet**—With care, partially open the book (at a fairly shallow angle) and interleave books with absorbent paper (paper towels are ideal). Begin at the back of the book and interleave every 20 or so pages. Book may be left flat until the interleaving material has absorbed some of the water, about an hour. Change interleaf material periodically until the book is only slightly damp.

**Books that are damp**—Stand the book on edge, lightly fan the leaves and allow the book to dry in a current of air. If the binding is damper than the text, place paper between the cover or boards and the book.

**Books that are almost dry**—Lay the book flat, push the covers and pages gently into position; place the book under a board and light weight, leaving it in this position until it is thoroughly dry.

## **Medicines and Cosmetics**

Medicines and cosmetics exposed to heat or smoke should be thrown away.

## **Food**

Food that was exposed to heat and smoke should be thrown away. Food that was in the freezer that still has ice crystals on it can be used, if not, discard it. Throw away any home-canned products or cans with bulges or dents. Undamaged commercially-canned food may be disinfected before opening by washing with detergent. Rinse in cool, clean water. Disinfect by immersing in a solution of two tablespoons of household bleach per one gallon water. Use a black permanent marker to re-label the can.

## **Refrigerators & Freezers**

Sometimes odors are difficult to remove due to damp insulation which absorbs odor. Here are some cleaning recommendations:

- ◆ Defrost and wash all surfaces with water and dishwasher detergent, rinse with two tablespoons baking soda per quart of water, re-rinse with clear water.
- ◆ Alternatively, wash with solution of one cup vinegar to one gallon water or with solution of one cup household ammonia to one gallon water.



## *Cleaning Tips*

### **Combating Odors**

It is generally a very complex problem due to the varied materials on the market today which are manufactured by combining natural and man-made fibers. For best results, contact a professional cleaning service.

### **Mildew**

Many people are allergic to molds and mildew. **Public Health Seattle-King County recommends that all mattresses, upholstered articles and wall to wall carpet and carpet pads be thrown out if they have been soaked. They cannot be dried fast or well enough to keep mildew and mold spores from growing.** If you do keep any of these items, follow the directions outlined in this document.

### **Upholstered Items & Mattresses**

- ◆ Remove loose mold from surfaces by brushing with a broom. Do this outdoors to prevent scattering mildew spores in the house.
- ◆ Vacuum the surface to draw out more of the mold.
- ◆ Thoroughly dry by using an electric heater or fan to carry away moist air.
- ◆ If mildew remains, sponge lightly with thick detergent suds using only the foam; wipe with a clean, damp cloth. If molds have grown into the inner part of an item, send to a reliable dry cleaner.

**CAUTION:** Keep all cleaning cloths saturated with cleaning solutions (other than water) in a metal container equipped with a tight fitting metal cover, out of the reach of children.

## **Clothing**

Always read the care label for proper cleaning instructions. Clothing that can withstand bleaching should be cleaned by washing in a mixture of ½ cup of ammonia to two gallons of water. Rinse in vinegar. (Use rubber gloves). Rinse with clear water and dry thoroughly. Additional information or services may be obtained from a commercial cleaning service.

## **Dishes**

Wash all china, glass, pots and pans in hot, soapy water, using a scrub brush to remove any debris. Rinse in clear, clean water and dip in a solution of two tablespoons of ordinary household bleach to one gallon of water. Dishes with deep cracks must be thrown away.

## **Plastic and Wood Items**

Plastic cookware, utensils, dishware, baby bottles and nipples, containers, cups and wooden utensils and bowls cannot be disinfected after exposure to contaminated water or chemicals. Do not use them for food or edible products.

## **Leather**

Wipe with a damp cloth, then with a dry cloth. Stuff your purses, shoes, etc., with paper to retain shape. Steel wool or a suede brush can be used on suedes. Contact leather and suede cleaners for expert information or go online for more cleaning tips and resources.

## **Removing White Spots on Furniture**

Wipe dry at once and polish with wax or furniture polish and a clean, soft cloth.

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## *Cleaning Tips*

### **Walls**

Walls may be washed while still wet. Use a mild soap and slightly damp cloth. Wash a small area at a time, working from floor up. Ceilings should be washed last. Stains can be painted over or covered with wall paper once wall is completely dry. Badly soaked wallpaper should be removed.

### **Washable Wallpaper**

- ◆ Heat and ventilate room for several days to dry both plaster and paper.
- ◆ Wipe mildewed paper with soap and a damp cloth, rinse with clear water.
- ◆ Re-paste edges or loosened sections.
- ◆ Work quickly so paper does not become soaked. Work from bottom to top to prevent streaking.

### **Linoleum/Vinyl Floors**

If water is allowed to remain underneath linoleum, odors and a breakdown of the wood begins. To remove or lift flooring, it is recommended that you contact a flooring specialist.

### **Wood Floors**

Do not attempt to straighten warped or buckled wood floors until they have dried out. Remove rugs and other floor covers to allow the floor to dry more quickly and mop off excess water as soon as possible. After flooring has dried, repair as necessary. If damage is too severe, the flooring may have to be removed and re-laid.



## **Wall to Wall Carpet**

See “Mildew” section for warnings about soaked carpeting on page 13. If carpeting is soaked, experts recommend replacing the carpet and padding completely. If you chose not to, a wet/dry vacuum or water extractor carpet cleaner can be rented at most supermarkets. Use it to remove standing water and dirt from carpets that are damp, but not soaked. Then add carpet cleaning detergent and clean the carpet as instructed. Rinse with vinegar and water in the tank of the machine. For further information, contact a commercial cleaning service.

## **Rugs**

Area rugs can be taken to cleaners to be professionally cleaned and dried for best results. If you chose to clean on your own, let rugs and carpets dry thoroughly. Shampoo with a commercial rug shampoo. Dry the rugs as quickly as possible by hanging or laying flat and exposing them to warm, dry air. Make sure rugs are thoroughly dry after cleaning.



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## *Contacts and Resources*

### **Seattle Fire Department**

Business	206-386-1400
Fire Marshal's Office	206-386-1450

### **American Red Cross**

*(Emergency Shelter, Clothing, Food)*

Disaster Services	206-323-2345
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### **Seattle Public Utilities**

*(Water and Garbage)*

	206-386-1800
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### **Seattle City Light**

*(Electricity)*

	206-706-0051
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### **Puget Sound Energy**

*(Natural Gas)*

	1-888-225-5773
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### **Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI)**

*\*Need permit prior to inspection*

	206-684-8950
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### **Customer Service Bureau**

	206-684-2489
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[www.seattle.gov/customerservice/infoguide.htm](http://www.seattle.gov/customerservice/infoguide.htm)

### **Seattle Police Department**

Business	206-625-5011
North Precinct	206-684-0850
South Precinct	206-386-1850
West Precinct	206-684-8917
Southwest Precinct	206-733-9800
East Precinct	206-684-4300

### **Low Interest Loans**

	206-684-0244
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*\*Available for low to moderate income Seattle homeowners in certain circumstances for the purpose of repairs, rebuilding, rehabilitation or weather.*

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## *Contacts and Resources*

**Social Security Administration** 1-800-772-1213  
*(Social Security or Medicare Cards)*

**Property and Income Tax**  
*(King County Assessor)*

Destroyed property 206-263-2332  
Personal property 206-296-5126

**Internal Revenue Service** 1-800-829-1040  
*\*Ask for a copy of Publication 547: Tax Information on Disasters, Casualty Losses and Thefts*

**Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration**  
*(Citizenship Papers)* 1-800-375-5283

**Bureau of Records** 360-236-4300  
*(Birth, Death, Marriage, Divorce Certificates)*

**State Department Passport Services** 202-955-0430  
*(24 hours)*

**National Personnel Records Center** 314-801-9195  
*(Military Discharge Papers)*

## **After the Fire**

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301 2nd Avenue South  
Seattle, WA 98104  
[www.seattle.gov/fire](http://www.seattle.gov/fire)



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