



Returning Home After An Evacuation

Regional District of Central Kootenay
Emergency Operations

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IMPORTANT: Please be sure to read this entire package carefully before entry into your home to minimize the risk of danger to you and your family.

Please note this document is intended to provide guidance to residents returning home after a wildfire. This guidance document is provided for information only and should not be considered legal advice. While efforts have been made to ensure accuracy and reliability, the information provided is intended as a reference and may not be applicable in all situations.

BE SAFE – at all times and everywhere in your community

Your safe return to your neighborhood is our priority. Please make it your priority too. This package was created to give you the information you need to plan your safe return. Please refer to it often.

You are returning to a community that was affected by a wildfire. Services that you are used to or rely on may be limited for some time.

Anyone with concerns about a medical condition is advised to consult with a physician before returning home. People can call HealthLinkBC at 8-1-1 if they have questions or need help finding a physician.

Returning home after a wildfire evacuation can be a particularly stressful and traumatic experience. The thought of all the work that needs to be completed so that you and your family can return to your normal lives can feel overwhelming. If you need to talk, call the Provincial Health Services Authority's Disaster Psychosocial Services Line toll free at 1-866-661-3311. The Mental Health Help Line at 310-6789 (no area code needed) and HealthLinkBC at 8-1-1 can also be helpful resources.

Some areas may be fenced for safety and security purposes. Please respect these restricted areas and any directions given to you by first responders or utilities workers. Doing so will keep you and your family and other members of the community safe.

Post-Wildfire Natural Hazards

Following a wildfire, some sloped areas may be at greater risk of exposure to geohazards, including but not limited to sediment transport and erosion due to debris flow, debris flood, rock fall, landslides, floods, and debris slides. When the fires have subsided, the Province will be undertaking a program of post-wildfire natural hazard risk analysis in areas deemed to be at risk. Results will be provided to Local Government for dissemination to affected residents. Visit the following websites to learn more: <https://climatereadybc.gov.bc.ca/> and <https://pwnhr-bcgov03.hub.arcgis.com>.

Re-Entry Checklist



IMPORTANT: If, at any time, you feel your home or surroundings are unsafe, do not proceed.

- Visit rdck.ca/EOCInfo regularly for notices about emergency declarations, evacuation alerts, orders and rescinds, and other updates
- Register to receive Emergency Notifications: vovent-alert.com/community/
- Find more information on the Emergency Notification System here: www.rdck.ca/emergencynotification
- For Water Advisory information on RDCK water systems visit: www.rdck.ca/water. For information on all other systems visit: <https://drinkingwaterforeveryone.ca/advisorymap/>.
- Thoroughly check for hazards before entering your house
- Exercise safety and caution when returning to a property by wearing items such as long pants, a long-sleeved shirt and rubber boots
- Wear an N-95 or equivalent dust mask (disposable facemask to filter dust and other air particulates) to reduce potential smoke exposure
- With limited services available in some areas, returning residents should expect some disruptions, service delays, and intermittent road and ferry closures. Check <http://www.drivebc.ca/> for updated road and ferry closures.
- Refer to the **CLEANING** tip sheet in this booklet for detailed information on cleaning and what you may want to include in your cleaning kit.
- If your home has been impacted by water damage, please refer to the **PREVENTING MOLD** tip sheet in this booklet.
- All spoiled food must be removed from fridges/freezers, double bag the items in contractor bags, and dispose of them as general household waste. Note: curbside pick up service may be provided in your area. Please check our website for more information: rdck.ca/EOCInfo
- Refer to the **STEPS TO TAKE WHEN YOU RETURN HOME** tip sheet for additional information on what to do when you arrive home

- Contact your insurance provider as soon as possible. Refer to the **INSURANCE INFORMATION** tip sheet for more information.
- Review the **NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS** section for information on additional resources that may be available to you.
- Refer to the **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS** section for some answers to commonly asked questions.

Water Quality

Due to the wildfires, your water system may have an advisory in effect for quality and safety (i.e. Water Quality Advisory, Boil Water Notice, Do Not Consume). Please visit the Interior Health Water Advisory Map at <https://drinkingwaterforeveryone.ca/advisorymap>. Note that some community and private water systems may not be included in the Interior Health Advisory database. If you are unsure, please contact your water service provider.

For RDCK water systems, please visit www.rdck.ca/water for information on current water quality conditions and updates. Please note the RDCK does not have jurisdiction on water systems outside of its 18 owned and operated systems.

Water Quality Advisory

A Water Quality Advisory indicates some level of risk with consuming water, and those young/old or with weakened immune systems may wish to boil water at a rolling boil for one minute prior to consuming.

Boil Water Notice

A Boil Water Notice indicates a level of microorganisms that may make individuals sick, and all water used for drinking/food prep/brushing teeth should be brought to a rolling boil for 1 minute.

Do Not Consume Notice

A Do Not Consume notice indicates there are harmful chemicals in the water source that cannot be removed by boiling water, and any form of consumption may make individuals sick. Bottled water should be used for drinking/food prep/brushing teeth. Water can still be used for household cleaning/bathing/flushing toilets.

Wells and Private Systems

If you are on a well, cistern or private water system that has been damaged, or may have been in an area that used fire retardant, assume the water is not safe to drink. Contact your private provider, call HealthLinkBC at 8-1-1 or visit <https://www.interiorhealth.ca/health-and-wellness/environmental-health-and-hazards/drinking-water> for more information.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) can help

Several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are ready and willing to help communities with recovery efforts. Which NGOs will be providing services in the weeks and months following an emergency depends on the specific event. Visit rdck.ca/EOCInfo for updates on which NGOs will be providing services.

Garbage Disposal

Talk with your insurers about what to do with your home contents including spoiled food, fridges and freezers before you take any action. Insurers sometimes require inventory or photos, and they might have their own contracted services available for you.

You are able to dispose of your household waste at any of RDCK transfer stations and landfills. Please visit rdck.ca/RRFacilities for more information regarding your nearest facilities and their hours of operation.

Hazardous materials, bulky waste, and other controlled wastes cannot be accepted at any transfer station. Some materials that could be asbestos or lead containing may require special handling, assessment, and possibly an appointment for disposal at a landfill. Dusty materials are a controlled waste at RDCK landfills and transfer stations, and must arrive at site double-bagged (any thickness or style). For more information on prohibited materials and controlled waste please visit: rdck.ca/waste-disposal.

Hazardous waste and free liquids are banned from RDCK resource recovery facilities. Call 1-800-667-4321 or www.rcbc.ca to find out where to dispose of these products.

Tip Sheet 1: Steps to take when you return home

When returning to a home or business after a wildfire, it is best to take extra precautions. Unseen dangers may linger, ranging from gas leaks and weakened foundations to exposed wires and power lines. Using caution can help reduce potential injuries. Play it safe. When in doubt, ask for help or seek advice from an expert.

Interior Health has compiled a collection of health and safety considerations: *“Returning to Your Home After Wildfires”*. Not all of the information may apply to your situation, however, there are some good tips to consider when you’re first returning home.

www.interiorhealth.ca/sites/default/files/PDFS/returning-to-your-home-after-wildfires.pdf

Here are some additional tips for safely returning to your home or business after a wildfire:

Check the status of your property:

- Contact your insurance company to discuss claim options and your bank to discuss mortgage or loan payment deferrals.

Prior to traveling home, be prepared with the following:

- food supplies (food left behind may be unsafe for consumption)
- clean drinking water
- medication (prescription or over-the-counter medication may not be safe to consume)
- boots
- long pants
- a long-sleeved shirt
- N-95 masks (surgical or dust masks not recommended). N-95 masks are available at hardware stores
- gloves
- a camera
- flashlight
- a cleaning kit

Other safety precautions:

- Check for hazards before entering your house.
- Do not allow children or pets to play in areas damaged by fire.

- Do not try to use any electrical appliances or power in your home or garage that may have come into contact with fire, water or fire retardant unless they have been cleared for use by a qualified electrician.
- Do a thorough visual inspection (including roofs and floors) of your property. The foundation and any brick or cement fireplace chimney may have been damaged by heat caused by fire.
- Check for electrical hazards such as exposed wires. Avoid contact with damaged or fallen power lines and poles. If there are any hazards, contact your provider:
 - BC Hydro at 1-800-BCHYDRO (1-800-224-9376)
 - FortisBC at 1-866-436-7847
- Beware of dust, ash, broken glass, and other sharp objects. Seek medical attention if you are injured.
- If you have a propane tank system, contact your service provider to do an inspection.
- Visually check the stability of trees around your property. Look for burn damage on the tree trunk or for visible damage of burnt tree roots. Any trees that have been damaged by fire may soon become a hazard. They may need to be cut down and removed.

Be cautious when going inside your home or business:

- ***Do not start cleaning or throwing anything away until you contact your insurance company.***
- Bring flashlights as there may not be power in your home.
- If applicable, ask your insurance provider what you should do about covering broken windows, doors and other exposed areas, appliances, pumping out water and any other activities you may need to do to secure and weatherproof your home.
- Take pictures and/or video, and make a list of damaged belongings.
- Residents should expect power to have been restored upon re-entry. If the power is off in your home, please check your breaker panel. If it is still off, please call your provider.
- Wear boots, long sleeves, long pants, and rubber gloves when working in an area that has been affected by fire. If you or any of your family members have breathing difficulties or asthma, take all appropriate precautions to protect yourself.
- Wear an N-95 mask while sifting through debris to avoid inhaling smoke and ash.
- It is important to wash your hands if they come into contact with ash or burned items.
- Until the water is safe to use, please follow the Do Not Consume Notice, Boil Water Notice, or Water Advisory for your water system.
- If you are not on a community water system, check your private water, sewer and septic systems. Call the company or contractor that usually provides these services to ask for an assessment.
- Be aware that animals may have taken shelter in your home, garage or outbuildings. Leaving a door open will allow animals to return to their natural surroundings on their own.
- Be cautious when disposing of garbage as it can attract bears and other wildlife leading to human-wildlife conflicts.
- If you encounter an animal that appears injured or unwilling to leave, call the B.C. Conservation Office at 1-877-952-7277.

Tip Sheet 2: Cleaning

This tip sheet provides general information for when you begin the clean-up process. If you are unable to do so on your own, volunteers from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) may be able to assist.

- Wash all interior walls and hard surfaces with a steam cleaner or white vinegar. **NEVER** use bleach to clean areas where fire retardants have been used. If you notice fire retardant residue on your property (red stains) use water or biodegradable household cleaners. Also clean inside cabinets, drawers and closets. Steam or wipe undersides of furniture, tables and chairs. To clean windows and glass, use clean water and a razor blade tool to help to remove any sticky residue.
- Use black garbage bags for disposal: Dispose of food and other landfill-appropriate items with your regular household waste. Check RDCK Resource Recovery facility operating hours at rdck.ca/RRFacilities. Ensure that you do not include any [prohibited/banned materials](#).
- Launder or dry clean: All clothing, linens and bedding should be laundered or dry cleaned.
- Wash all movable items: All movable items should be washed with a steam cleaner or microfibre cloth. This includes picture frames and knick-knacks.
- Wash all children's toys: Wash down children's outside toys, play structures and recreational equipment to remove any residual fire contaminants. Wash down sandboxes with clean water; if the sandbox drains directly into the soil, repeat this step several times. If the sandbox is a plastic container, remove the sand and replace it with clean sand.
- Disinfect and deodorize: Upholstery, fabric window treatments, etc., can be spray-treated with deodorizing products available at most supermarkets. Avoid room sprays since they just cover up the problem and don't fix it. Steam items including carpets, window coverings, upholstered furniture and mattresses. Steam melts the tar and neutralizes the odour and carbon film left by wildfires.
- Clean ductwork: Have heating, ventilating and air conditioning units and all ductwork professionally cleaned to remove soot, ash and smoke residue. Change filters when you first return to the premise and then continue to replace them at least once a month for the next year.
- Clean exterior surfaces: Pressure wash or scrub all exterior surfaces including walls, walks, drives, decks, windows and screens.
- Vinyl siding that has been stained by the use of fire retardant may qualify for replacement in most insurance policies. Contact your insurance company for coverage included in your policy.
- Consult a professional: If required, consult or hire professional cleaners.
- **Keep all receipts:** Remember to keep all receipts for cleaning and other expenses to provide to your insurance company for possible reimbursement.

Build a Clean-up Kit:

Consider the following to build a clean-up kit before you return home. Materials can be purchased at most hardware stores or wherever you normally buy household goods.

Disaster Management Clean-up Kits typically include:

- 5-gallon bucket with a reusable lid
- 20-ounce cotton wet mop head
- 14" push broom head
- 14" floor squeegee head
- Two 54" four-section metal handles
- 9" capped sweep head
- 7" scrub brush
- Two cellulose sponges
- One pair leather palm work gloves
- Two pairs household rubber gloves
- N95 masks
- Ten heavy duty garbage bags
- 1-litre bleach-based all-purpose cleaner

After Fire Clean-up Kits typically include:

- Full release smoke odour fogger
- Concentrated liquid deodorizer for washing machine
- Two pairs leather-palm work gloves
- Ten garbage bags
- Flashlight with 3-AAA batteries included
- One 4-pack AAA batteries
- Surface antibacterial wipes
- Empty 32-ounce plastic spray bottle with trigger spray
- 32-ounce bottle all-purpose cleaner/disinfectant
- Toilet paper
- N95 masks
- Two pairs nitrile gloves
- Two pairs safety glasses – clear lens
- Drawstring backpack

Tip Sheet 3: Preventing mold

If your home was damaged by water, you will need to remove of excess water to prevent mold growth. **Check with your insurance adjuster** before completing any work on your damaged home.

- Call your insurance company and let them and your restoration contractor know as soon as possible if you find any visible mold growth or smell mold inside your home.
- When you are trying to decide what to keep or to throw away, be safe and always remember: “When in doubt, throw it out.”
- Dry all wet items as soon as possible. Wet or waterlogged carpeting should be dried as quickly as possible, and any underlay should be removed. Steam cleaning carpets with a disinfectant will be adequate.
- Clean and disinfect: To help prevent mold growth, any water damaged or stained surfaces and appliances should be checked for damage, cleaned and disinfected with a 1:10 parts household bleach to water solution (2 tsp. bleach in 750 ml water or 1 capful bleach in 1 gallon water). **ONLY USE BLEACH IF IT IS SAFE TO DO SO – NEVER USE BLEACH IN THE PRESENCE OF FIRE RETARDANTS.**
- Get air moving inside your house: Open windows and use a fan to circulate the inside air.
- Dehumidifiers reduce moisture: You may need to use a dehumidifier to help remove excess moisture from the air inside your home.
- You may wish to remove stained rugs, curtains and soft furniture from your home to clean them.

Tip Sheet 4: Food disposal

When you are trying to decide what food to keep or throw away, be safe and always remember: **“When in doubt, throw it out.”**

IF A POWER OUTAGE OCCURRED DURING THE EVACUATION ORDER, PERISHABLE ITEMS MAY NEED TO BE DISPOSED OF IMMEDIATELY UPON YOUR RETURN, INCLUDING ITEMS IN YOUR FREEZER.

Dispose of:

- All dry goods that are not in sealed packages/cans.
- Any unrefrigerated raw vegetables or fruits, or any foods that were stored in porous containers (e.g., cardboard, foam containers, etc.).
- Food that was in bowls on counters/tables.
- All jarred foods, as the heat from the fire likely compromised the safety seal.
- Food that shows signs of damage from heat or fire, including ash or smoke.
- Any canned food where the can looks like it is bulging or rusted. Canned foods that look like they may be okay need to be cleaned and disinfected with soap and water before being opened to make sure the contents aren't contaminated.
- Any food that has come in contact with liquid waste, sewage, chemicals or water.
- Any food displaying an off odour or signs of spoilage.

NOTE: Double bag any spoiled food waste

Tip Sheet 5: Insurance information

If you are insured:

1. Contact your insurance company/broker as soon as possible. Most have a 24-hour claims service. The sooner the insurance company is notified, the quicker your insurance claim can be processed.
2. Try to create an inventory of household items, both inside and outside of the buildings, which have been damaged by fire or smoke. Photograph or video the damage.
3. Work with your insurance company and their accredited fire restoration companies to restore or rebuild your home.
4. In the event that any of these suggestions conflict with information provided by your insurer, please follow the instructions provided by your insurer.

If you are not insured:

For information on available assistance, check with:

- British Columbia Emergency Support Services (ESS): call 1-800-387-4258.
- Canadian Red Cross: call 1-888-800-6493 or website: www.redcross.ca.
- Other non-government organizations (NGOs), as their support becomes available. Check rdck.ca/EOCInfo for updates on NGOs that can help offer support.

Restoration Contractors:

- As much as possible, work with and through your insurance company. They can recommend reputable restoration contractors who can help and who know the proper standards to follow.
- If you decide to choose your own restoration contractor, check their references.
- If anyone in your family is sensitive to chemicals or mold, you need to let the restoration contractor know so that they can take all necessary precautions.

Frequently Asked Questions

Health

I have a medical condition. Should I return home?

Anyone with concerns about a medical condition is advised to consult with a physician before returning home. People can call HealthLinkBC at 8-1-1 if they have questions or need help finding a physician.

Where can I get mental health support?

Experiencing a disaster such as a wildfire can be particularly stressful and overwhelming. If you need to talk, call the Provincial Health Services Authority's Disaster Psychosocial Services Line toll free at 1-866-661-3311. The following organizations may also be able to provide helpful mental health resources:

- The Mental Health Help Line at 310-6789 (no area code needed).
- HealthLinkBC at 8-1-1 can also be helpful resources.
- The BC Division of the Canadian Mental Health Association also has excellent resources for dealing with natural disaster stress at website <https://bc.cmha.ca/>.

Is the community accessible for persons with disabilities?

There may be unique circumstances that have yet to be identified. If you require assistance or would like to report an issue, please call the RDCK EOC at 250-352-7701.

Working

My workplace was destroyed in the fire and I'm now unemployed. What do I do now?

Affected workers are encouraged to apply for Employment Insurance (EI) benefits as soon as possible, even without a Record of Employment. If you were receiving EI benefits before the evacuation, you should also contact EI as it could affect how you're reporting activity.

- Apply by phone: 1-800-206-7218
- Apply online at <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/ei/ei-regular-benefit.html>

Are you concerned about whether or not it's safe to return to work?

Safety of workers is paramount. Workers are protected by BC's Occupational Health and Safety laws. If you have questions or concerns about working conditions, talk to your employer. If you still have concerns after speaking with your employer, visit <https://www.worksafebc.com/>

Road Safety and Maintenance

Who maintains the neighbourhood roads?

In Electoral Areas, the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure is responsible for roads, including safety and maintenance. Please call the Province's contractor Yellowhead Road and Bridge LTD (YRB) at 1-888-352-0356 for maintenance or safety concerns.

Where do I get information about road closures or delays?

Visit <https://www.drivebc.ca/> for info about traffic, road and weather conditions.

Waste Disposal

Most demolition waste can be accepted at RDCK landfills, and in smaller amounts (5 cubic metres or less) at transfer station. Disposals of asbestos-containing materials must be booked through the RDCK's head office (250-352-8161) ahead of time. For more information on waste disposal options, please visit: www.rdck.ca/waste

Hazardous waste and free liquids are banned from the RDCK resource recovery facilities. Call 1-800-667-4321 or www.rcbc.ca to find out where to dispose of these products.

Additional hours may be added to regular opening hours of RDCK facilities. Please check with the RDCK's website: rdck.ca/RRFacilities to find the most up-to-date household waste information.

In some cases, areas that have suffered prolonged power outages due to wildfire or other natural disasters, may be eligible for free collection of damaged fridges and freezers. For updates on eligibility visit www.rdck.ca/eocinfo or call the RDCK EOC at 250-352-7701.

Utilities

Once you are home you may need to re-establish your utilities or check your billing. Contact your provider directly. Included below are some of the common utility-related resources in our area:

- BC Hydro: 1-800-BCHYDRO (1-800-224-9376)
- FortisBC Electricity: 1-866-436-7847; Natural gas: 1-888-224-2710 (web: <https://fortisbc.com>)
- BC 1 Call (for any underground service inquiries before you dig) website: bc1c.ca or call 1-800-474-6886
- Village of Slocan Water Utility System: 250-355-2277 or 250-355-2500
- Rogers & Shaw Telecommunications: (toll free) 1-888-472-2222 (web: www.shaw.ca and www.rogers.com)
- TELUS Mobility: *611 on your TELUS mobile phone or call 1-866-558-2273; TELUS Internet: Toll-free call 1-888-811-2323 (web: www.telus.com)

- For community and private water systems please contact your service provider or the contractor who regularly services your system. For RDCK owned and operated water systems: 250-352-8161.

Home and Property

Do I need to get my home inspected?

Please talk to your insurance provider. Refer to the **INSURANCE INFORMATION** tip sheet in this package.

Do I need permits to begin rebuilding and repairing my house?

Depending on the extent of damage, permits may be required. For properties within the RDCK, please reach out to the RDCK Building Department for more information. The Regional District provides the Building Services function for the following member municipalities:

- Village of Kaslo
- Village of Nakusp
- Village of New Denver
- Village of Salmo
- Village of Silverton
- Village of Slocan

Building permits are required for the construction, addition, alteration or demolition of any building or structure. Accessory buildings less than 10 square meters are exempt.

If you live in the RDCK or one of the above Villages and have building permit questions, please call 250-352-8155 or email blddept@rdck.bc.ca.

How do I know if my house was without power?

A simple way of knowing is if your digital clocks are blinking. However, this will not indicate how long the power was off. If you need specific information please contact your hydro service provider. BC Hydro at 1-800-BCHYDRO (1-800-224-9376).

Useful Links

BC Wildfire Services Claim Contact

There is a claims process through BC Wildfire that may be available if your property was damaged by wildfire suppression activities. To initiate the claims process, please email: BCWSClaims@gov.bc.ca.

A background document titled “*Compensation for Fire Control Damage*” can be found at: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/wildfire-status/about-bc-wildfire-service/bcws-policies/policy_99_compensation_for_fire_control_damage.pdf

Recovering After a Wildfire

Please refer to this website - BC emergency recovery resource: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/emergency-management/preparedbc/know-your-hazards/wildfires/after-wildfire>

What to do After a Wildfire

Please refer to this ‘*What to do after a fire*’ document at: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/public-safety/fire-safety/fire-prevention-and-education/ofc_what_to_do_after_a_fire.pdf

BC Guidance for Owners of Property Impacted by Wildfire Contaminants

Please refer to the document at this link: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/environment/air-land-water/site-remediation/docs/guidance-documents/bc_guidance_for_property_impacted_by_wildfire.pdf