

What to do...



... after the fire  
is out.

*A guide to help you after the fire.*

# What To Do After The Fire Is Out

## KITTITAS COUNTY FIRE DISTRICT 2

509-933-7231  
www.kvfr.org

We are sorry for your loss. Experiencing the devastation and destruction of a fire is a traumatic event. Recovery can be physically and mentally draining. The personnel of your fire district have created this resource pamphlet to assist you in returning your life to normal. We want you to know that you can expect our assistance in helping you recover and the contact numbers for the fire department we have provided are 24 hour numbers. Should you need help at any time, please give us a call.

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## **Protecting Your Property**

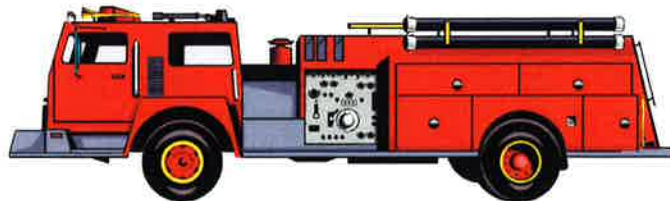
After the Fire Department leaves, the building becomes your responsibility. We have made sure the fire is out and maybe even done some basic debris removal. Our job is also to determine the cause of the fire. It is now up to you to ensure the damages are repaired.

If you are no longer able to live in the building you should remove all valuables. Remember, the fire may have caused damage to structural members, and floors and ceilings could be unstable. If a fire fighter or an investigator is still on the scene, they can assist you in recovering items that need to be removed immediately.

If the Fire Department is investigating the fire, contact the Fire Prevention Bureau at 509-933-7241 prior to removing any items from the building. Though fire fighters will cover openings to protect your home from the elements, you are responsible for securing doors and windows from unauthorized entry.

If you own or are purchasing the property, contact your insurance company or agent as soon as possible. If you are renting or leasing you must contact the owner. Your insurance agent will know what parts of the damage are insured. In some cases they may be able to assist you by providing the names of reputable contractors who can perform restoration.

As soon as it is practical, itemize everything that has been damaged. List even the things you feel are insignificant. Never throw anything out until you have reached an agreement with your insurance company. Be as detailed and accurate as you can with your inventory. Try to remember when you bought the item, how much you paid, and how much it will cost to replace it. Under some homeowner policies, you are entitled to full replacement for structural damage up to the limits of your coverage.



The company will usually send a contractor to estimate the repair costs to your home. It is advisable to have a damage appraisal done so you can have something to compare with the insurance company's offer.

Never hire a contractor until you have checked credentials. Get everything in writing prior to having any work started.

**Mattresses** - Removing odors from a mattress is very difficult and a professional restoration company should be consulted. Sleeping on a contaminated mattress may create health problems.

**Cooking Utensils** - Pots, pans, flatware, and other similar items can be washed with hot soapy water, rinsed, then polished with a fine powdered cleaner. Copper and brass can be polished with special cleaners. In the absence of special cleaners, sprinkle salt on a piece of lemon or on a cloth saturated in white vinegar and polish.

**Smoke and Soot Damaged Clothes** - Clothing that can withstand bleach often can be cleaned by washing as follows:

Mix - 4-6 Tbs. trisodium phosphates, 1-cup Lysol or any household chlorine Bleach, and 1-cup water.  
Add clothes, and rinse with clear water.

Rewash the clothes prior to drying in a commercial laundry. Clothes that cannot withstand bleach should be washed twice in a commercial washer before drying. Always read label carefully before treating garments.

**Food Items:**

Canned foods in glass jars should be discarded if they were subject to heat because there is a high probability the seal may be compromised. Commercially canned foods should be discarded if the can is dented, has bulges, or has rusted.

To disinfect the exterior of the can simply wash it in a solution of three tablespoons of household bleach to one-gallon of water.

Meats are generally unsafe to eat after exposure to heat and fire products.

Fruits and vegetables ferment as they begin to spoil and generally absorb smoke and other by-products of fire; leaving the fruit discolored and bitter to the taste. It is generally a wise decision to dispose of fruit exposed to products of combustion.

**Medicine** - Any medication that has been exposed to heat or water damage should be discarded immediately.

**Appliances** - Wash with a solution of one-cup household ammonia to one-gallon of water and allow the appliance to dry. Placing a piece of charcoal (not the kind with embedded lighter fluid) or baking soda in the appliance will help absorb any residual odors.

If your freezer is not working, food will generally stay safe, assuming it was not exposed to high temperatures for a couple of days. As long as the food is still frozen and the door to the freezer stayed sealed, the contents may be transferred to another freezer.



**Soot and Smoke Odors: Walls, Wallpaper, Furniture and Floors** - Odors on walls and floors can be removed with the following solution:

4-6 Tbsp. trisodium phosphates  
1-cup Lysol or any chlorine bleach  
1-gallon water

Mix together and wash articles thoroughly. Wear rubber gloves when cleaning. After washing the articles, rinse with clear water and dry. Trisodium phosphate can be obtained from a hardware store.

There fire restoration companies in the area that are skilled at cleaning fire damage from walls as well as fabric furniture. Contact information can be obtained in the phone book or on the internet.

**Wood furniture or fixtures can be treated in the following way:**

1. Clear off all water and debris.
2. Remove drawers. Let dry completely so they will not bind or stick when replaced.
3. Scrub with a stiff brush and cleaning solution.
4. Wet wood can decay and mold; so dry completely. Open all doors and windows for good ventilation. Turn your furnace or air conditioner on if needed.
5. If mold develops on your furniture, wipe the mixture with a cloth rinsed in a mild bleach and water solution.
6. Never dry wood furniture in the sun. This can cause warping.
7. To remove white spots or film from the furniture, rub the wood with a cloth soaked in  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup household ammonia to  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup water solution, then wipe dry and polish with wax or lemon oil. Common toothpaste also works well for polishing water spots from wood.

You can also polish the wood surface with a 4/0 steel wool pad dipped in liquid polishing wax, wipe with a soft cloth, then buff.

**Books** - can be dried by placing them on end, with the pages separated. They should then be piled and pressed to prevent the pages from crinkling. To prevent mildew, alternate drying and pressing until the books are thoroughly dry. A fan directed toward the books will help them dry faster.

**Carpets and Rugs** - A wet/dry vacuum, water extractor, or carpet cleaner are excellent for this job. They can be rented at most supermarkets and will remove standing water and dirt. Add carpet-cleaning solution and clean the carpet as instructed on the machine. Rinse by using a solution of white vinegar and water in the tank of the machine.

Allow throw rugs to dry thoroughly. Clean by sweeping or vacuuming, then shampoo with a commercial rug shampoo. Dry the rugs as quickly as possible by laying them flat and allowing warm, dry air to circulate around them. A fan will speed the drying. Make sure rugs are dry because moisture remaining in them will quickly rot the rugs.

**Important Documents** - can be damaged or destroyed as a result of a fire. The following is a list of documents you should try to locate as soon as possible after a fire. These include:

- Birth Certificates
- Driver's Licenses
- Medical Records
- Bank Records
- Insurance Policies
- Military Discharge Papers
- Tax Records
- Passports
- Vehicle Registrations and Titles
- Social Security Card
- Marriage Papers or Divorce Decrees
- Citizenship Papers
- Wills and/or Burial Contracts
- Animal Registrations
- Death Certificates
- Stocks and Bonds
- 



Public assistance clients should notify the DSHS office at 1-800-737-0617 if their ID card is damaged or destroyed. This will reduce problems if the need arises for check cashing, medical aid, or food assistance programs.

NOTE: It is suggested you store all important documents in a secure container and keep them with you at all times until you get settled after the fire.

**Damaged Money and Securities** - Handle burned paper currency as little as possible. Attempt to encase each bill in or portion thereof in plastic wrap for preservation. Zip-lock style plastic bags work well for this purpose. If the money is only half-burned or less (if half or more of the bill is intact) you can mail burned or torn currency to:

Department of Treasury  
Bureau of Engraving and Printing  
OCS Room 344-PD  
P.O. Box 37048  
Washington, DC 20013

Damaged coins:  
United States Mint  
P.O. Box 400  
Philadelphia, PA 19106

**Utilities** - Often the fire department will have utility services shut off or disconnected as a safety precaution. This also prevents further damage to the structure and contents. The procedures for reestablishing utility services are as follows:

**Electricity** - A service technician must check the wiring to ensure it is safe prior to the power being turned on. This can be accomplished by contacting Ellensburg City Light at 509-925-8534, Kittitas County PUD at 509-933-7200 or Puget Sound Energy at 1-888-225-5773.



**Water** - The water can be turned back on by contacting the City Water Department if you are served by this agency. Well water service can be restored by the resident. Please exercise caution because the fire may have damaged the plumbing, which can cause water damage if the pipes are again filled with water. Ellensburg City Water – 509-962-7230.

**Natural Gas / Propane** - **DO NOT** turn the gas back on. PSE, Ellensburg City Gas or your propane distributor can assist you in restoring gas service.

A1 Propane -	509-925-1366
Ellensburg City Gas –	509-962-7124
Northern Energy –	509-925-5277
PSE –	888-225-5773

**Telephone** - Contact your telephone company business office at 509-925-1425.

### **Common Questions**

Now that the fire is over, we would like to continue to help as much as possible. The following is a collection of information that will assist you in adjusting and recovering from a fire. Let's begin by answering some common questions about our operations:

1. Why did the fire fighters break windows and cut holes in my roof?

When fire develops inside a structure it moves upward and outward from the source. Fire fighters cut holes in roofs and break windows to release heat and smoke. This stops the fire from spreading. Though these techniques obviously create damage, they allow us to reduce the heat and fight the fire more efficiently, which in turn, reduces the fire damage. Breaking windows and releasing smoke in a planned, controlled manner, can also provide fresh air for anyone who may be trapped by the fire.

## 2. Why did fire fighters punch holes in my walls and ceiling?

Fire fighters need to open walls and ceiling spaces to ensure there are no hidden areas of fire. Before we leave your property we have to be certain the fire is completely out. If you have any other questions about our operations, about your fire, or would like to obtain a copy of the fire report call: 509-962-7274.

## 3. Why does the fire department control access into my property?

The fire department must make sure that the property is safe and that all hidden fires are out. A smoldering fire can stay hidden for more than 24 hours. Additionally, every fire department is charged with the responsibility of determining the cause and origin of every fire it responds to. To do so, it is necessary to maintain physical control of the scene until we have accomplished this. We will work with property owners or renters to retrieve items not directly linked to cause and origin and will return the property to the owner or responsible party as soon as possible.

## **If You Cannot Live in Your House**

There is help if you need immediate lodging, food, or medications. Either a fire fighter or an investigator can assist you in contacting the American Red Cross. There are other community agencies available to supplement anything the Red Cross is not able to provide. A Red Cross disaster caseworker can assist you in contacting the appropriate agencies. The local Red Cross chapter can be contacted at 509-925-5866.

If you have to leave your house, notify the following agencies of your new address:

- Post Office
- Banks
- Insurance Company
- Mortgage Company
- Credit Card Companies
- Local School District (if you have children)
- Social Security Administration (if appropriate)
- Delivery Companies (newspapers, etc.)

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- Utility Companies
- Fire Department

If your home is structurally damaged to the point that it is not habitable, a building inspector will be notified by the fire department. After a building safety inspection is completed a permit must be obtained prior to making repairs.

Ellensburg Building Department: 509-962-7231

Kittitas County Building Department: 509-962-7694

**Property and Income Tax Adjustments** - Property that is extensively damaged by fire may qualify for a re-evaluation and a reduction in tax assessment. Information and applications are available from:

Kittitas County Assessors Office  
205 W 5<sup>th</sup> Ave  
Ellensburg, Washington 98926  
509-962-7501

Uninsured loss of property, both real estate and personal, may entitle you to deductions on your income tax. Information is available from the Internal Revenue Service:

1-800-829-1040



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