



Fraser Valley Regional District

Welcome Back: Returning After a Wildfire

Information for Returning Residents

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Note: Before returning home, contact your utility and service providers (such as electricity, propane, water, etc.) to let them know you are returning and to learn about any required safety checks, inspections or service reconnections. See the last page of this guide for contact information.

The Fraser Valley Regional District made this guide using information from the Province of BC, Fraser Health, and other reliable sources. We hope it helps you.

Leaving your home during an emergency can be stressful. Going back home can also be hard because you may not know what to expect. Your area may still be on Evacuation Alert so you will need to be prepared to evacuate again.

Even when an Evacuation Order is over, there may still be dangers. There could be fallen trees, damaged buildings, or other hazards.

Before moving back into your home you should carefully check your home to make sure it is safe.



PROTECT YOURSELF

- Keep a cell phone or radio on for weather and evacuation updates
- Review your evacuation plan and be prepared to leave again, quickly if needed
- Ensure you have a full tank of gas
- Wear a long sleeve shirt, long pants, and sturdy shoes
- Bring personal protective equipment: gloves, masks/respirators, safety glasses
- Bring plenty of bottled water and enough food to last 14 days



BUILD A BASIC RE-ENTRY KIT

To help access, assess and clean up your home, you'll need basic supplies, including:

- Flashlight, gloves and heavy-duty garbage bags
- Cleaning supplies (broom, mop, sponges, bucket, bleach, cleaners)
- Small tools (hammer, screwdriver, shovel, saw, etc.)
- Camera to record property condition and damages for insurance purposes
- First aid kit



UNDERSTAND POTENTIAL HAZARDS TO WATCH FOR

- Slip, trip, and fall hazards from unstable structures, damaged trees, collapsing roofs, etc.
- Sharp objects such as nails, broken glass, metal, concrete, or wood debris
- Damaged or leaking household hazardous materials
- Residue from smoke, soot, ash, and demolition dust
- Hot spots, ash pits
- Pressurized containers or combustible materials

PREPARING TO RETURN



Wildfire danger may still very high in nearby areas.

Being allowed to return home is great news but there are still some real risks.

It is important to be aware of the risks and responsibilities of returning home and ensuring you are ready to evacuate again if the fire conditions change.

Be aware that conditions are still challenging and some services may not be fully available.



Important

- There may be an active wildfire in the area. Wildfire activity can change quickly and without little notice, and new Evacuation Alert or Evacuation Order may be issued. Always be ready to go again.
- Emergency workers are still busy helping people and protecting communities. Watch for their vehicles and equipment and give them right of way.
- Some homes and properties may not have power. Check with your service providers for reconnections.
- A boil water advisory may be in place. Check the FVRD website water page to learn if you have an advisory in place. Do not drink tap water or use it to wash food or dishes until you are sure it is safe. If a boil water advisory is in place see page 7 for information on what to do.
- Road conditions can change quickly. Check DriveBC.ca before you leave and during your trip for the latest road and closure information.
- Businesses may take time to reopen so arrive home with your own supplies.
- Stay safe and avoid unnecessary risks.

HAZARDS TO WATCH FOR



A burned property can look deceptively normal. The following hazards are common after a wildfire. When in doubt, ask a qualified professional rather than handling something yourself.



Hazardous Materials



- Burned buildings and materials can release toxic substances, including asbestos. Handling and disposal of hazardous materials should be left to trained professionals.
- Propane tanks may be damaged by heat even if they look fine. Do not handle a propane tank yourself. Contact your propane supplier to have it inspected.
- If your home sat empty during the evacuation, check for signs of a rodent infestation before cleaning, since droppings can carry hantavirus. Fraser Health can advise on safe clean-up.



Dangerous Trees & Power Lines



- Fire can weaken a tree's roots, trunk or branches without obvious signs from the ground. A weakened tree can fall at any time, including in calm weather.
- Do not attempt to remove a burned or damaged tree yourself. This work should be done by a qualified danger tree assessor or faller.
- Treat every downed or damaged power line as live, even if the area has been without power for some time.
- Do not approach or touch a power line. Report damaged lines to 911 right away.



Wildlife



- Spoiled food and food odours can attract bears and other wildlife to a property, especially where power has been out for a while.
- Buildings left empty can also attract mice and other rodents.
- If you encounter wildlife on your property, keep your distance and give them a way to leave.



Working Safely on your Property



- Wear appropriate protective equipment, such as sturdy boots, gloves and eye protection. A respirator or other breathing protection may be needed in some conditions.
- Clean-up is physically demanding. Pace yourself, stay hydrated and take breaks.



Insurance Claims

- Contact your insurance company as soon as possible to start a claim.
- Ask your insurer about Additional Living Expenses (ALE) coverage if you cannot live in your home.
- Request a copy of your full policy so you understand what is covered.
- Keep a written record of all conversations with your insurance adjuster.

Financial Help & Assistance Programs

- Wildfires are considered an insurable event, so provincial Disaster Financial Assistance is not usually available for wildfire losses.
- Canadian Red Cross and other organizations may offer financial assistance after a declared disaster.
- As part of the recovery process, the FVRD will assist in connecting you with available community recovery programs.
- If you are a renter, contact your landlord and your tenant insurance provider.



Tip

Apply for all programs you may qualify for. You can receive help from multiple sources as long as the same loss is not paid twice.

Documenting Your Loss

- Photograph and video all damage from multiple angles before any cleanup.
- Make a detailed inventory of damaged or destroyed belongings, including approximate value and date of purchase.
- Save damaged items until your adjuster has seen them, if safe to do so.
- Gather supporting documents: receipts, bank statements, warranty cards, serial numbers.
- Keep a log of all recovery-related expenses with dates and amounts.
- Store copies of all documents digitally (cloud storage or email to yourself).



Important

Thorough documentation strengthens your insurance claim and any applications for financial assistance. Start as early as possible.



Water Advisory Status

A Boil Water Advisory may be in effect. Check the FVRD website on the water page to confirm. If you are on a Boil Water Advisory, do not drink tap water, brush your teeth, prepare food with it, wash fruits and vegetables, or wash dishes with it until you have made it safe (see below).

Private Wells & Cisterns

- If your home uses a well, cistern, or private water system, assume the water is not safe to drink until you have confirmed potability with the owner/operator.
- Wildfire, ash, dirt, and other contaminants can enter water sources during an emergency.
- Private water system operators are responsible to ensure the water provided is safe to drink.
- Operators should assess their water systems before resuming normal operations.
- Have the water tested and approved before using it for drinking or cooking.
- For questions regarding responsibilities or the actions needed to ensure the water supply is safe for potable use contact Fraser Health Authority.

Making Water Safe

If you are not sure your water is free of biohazard, use one of these methods:

Boiling

Bring water to a rolling boil for at least **2 minutes**. Let it cool before using. Store it in the refrigerator.

Household Bleach

Add 1 tsp of unscented household bleach to 1 litre of cold water. Mix well. Let stand for 30 minutes before using. Now it can be used for cleaning and washing dishes.

Water Purification Tablets

Use iodine or chlorine tablets. Follow the instructions on the package.

Questions About Water Safety

Contact Fraser Health for information about water testing, drinking water safety, and water advisories.



Electricity

- Do not restore power yourself if equipment is damaged.
- Have damaged electrical systems inspected.

Telecommunications

- Report damaged telephone or internet lines.
- Cell service may be interrupted. Ensure you still have internet or another way to reach the significant people in your life and emergency responders should you have an emergency.

Septic systems

- Wildfire and firefighting activities can damage septic fields and infrastructure.
- Watch for slow drains, sewage smells, or wastewater surfacing.
- If you suspect damage, contact a qualified septic professional.



Important

Contact your utility and service providers for any required safety checks, inspections or service reconnections.



If your home was affected by wildfire, some food may no longer be safe to eat. Use the guidance below to decide what to keep and what to discard.

How do I know if my food is safe?

When in doubt, throw it out. Do not taste food to determine if it is safe.

What food should I discard?

Discard the following:

- Refrigerated food if power was lost for more than 4 hours
- Frozen food that has thawed
- Any food exposed to heat, smoke, soot, or ash
- Food with unusual odour, colour, or texture
- Unsealed food stored in cupboards such as crackers, pasta, or chips.

Are canned goods safe?

Commercially canned goods are usually safe unless the cans are bulging, rusted, or badly dented. Discard any cans that show these signs.



Important

Double bag spoiled food in garbage bags, and dispose of them as general household waste.

CLEANING YOUR HOME & PROPERTY



After you speak to your insurance provider and have taken photos and an inventory of items, you can begin to clean up of your home and property.

- Wear masks or respirators and gloves to avoid direct contact with ash and debris.
- Wash off any ash and contaminants as soon as possible.
- Use a garden hose, sprayer or pressure washer on the exterior of your home, driveways, walkways, vehicles, patios, decks and outdoor furniture to reduce dust and ash. Rinse off air intakes, air conditioners and filters.
- DO NOT USE an air hose or leaf blower to clean the exterior of your home – you do not want to drive more contaminants into your home.
- Replace furnace, heat pump, and air conditioner filters after returning home.
- Wash all interior surfaces with mild detergent or appropriate cleaning solution and rinse thoroughly with warm water. Don't forget to clean the interiors of closets, cupboards, drawers and other locations to remove any ash, dust, or odour. Wiping surfaces with white vinegar can help to remove odour and residue from smoke. Baking soda can also help to remove odours.
- Do not disturb or remove asbestos and fibreglass materials (Use qualified contractors with proper protection).
- Wash fridges and freezers with baking soda and water, vinegar or ammonia to remove odours.
- Wash and disinfect all dishes and utensils in boiling water or a diluted bleach solution. DO NOT USE contaminated water to wash dishes or hands.
- Discard any belongings damaged by smoke, heat, ash and chemicals.
- It may not be safe to eat fruits or vegetables that were growing above ground during the fire, especially if they came into contact with fire retardants. Dispose contaminated produce.
- If you have insurance, remember to keep all receipts for cleaning and other expenses for potential reimbursement.



Dispose of food and other landfill-appropriate items with your regular household garbage.



Place hazardous materials, including solvents and chemicals, in heavy-duty garbage bags separate from regular waste. Check the Recycling Council of BC website for disposal guidance.



Even after a wildfire is no longer a direct threat, smoke, ash, and dust can still affect the air around your home. You may notice smoky smells, ash on surfaces, or poor air quality during cleanup activities. Breathing in smoke or ash can irritate your eyes, nose, throat, and lungs. Children, older adults, pregnant people, and people with asthma or other breathing conditions may be more sensitive to these effects. Take extra care during cleanup and limit outdoor activities if air quality is poor.

Tips for Staying Safe

- Check local air quality conditions before spending long periods outdoors.
- Visit public spaces like recreation centres or malls that typically have good ventilation systems.
- Wear a well-fitted N95 respirator when cleaning ash, soot, or dusty debris.
- Limit strenuous outdoor work on smoky or dusty days.
- Keep windows and doors closed if smoke levels increase.
- Use a portable air cleaner with a HEPA filter if available.
- Drink plenty of water and take frequent breaks during cleanup.

Take Extra Precautions

Smoke affects everyone, but these groups face higher risk of serious effects:

- People with asthma, COPD, heart disease, or other breathing conditions
- Infants, young children, and pregnant people
- Seniors
- Outdoor workers

If smoke becomes heavy, reduce outdoor activities and follow public health advice.



When to be concerned and seek medical care

Commonly people can experience: irritated eyes, a runny nose, or a scratchy or sore throat.

Seek medical care or talk to your health-care provider if you experience shortness of breath, heart palpitations or chest pain, or just feel generally unwell.

Mental Health and Stress

Emergencies are stressful. If you are feeling stressed or anxious, you are not alone. To reduce stress and anxiety, practice the following steps:



TAKE CARE

- Stress takes a toll on our physical and mental health.
- Eating well, exercising, and getting enough sleep can lower stress and helps us cope.



HELP OTHERS

- Reaching out and helping others can help us regain a sense of purpose and community as we confront challenges together.



ASK FOR HELP

- Talking helps, whether it's with family, friends, a doctor, or counsellor.
- Crisis lines are available to listen and help at any time.



OTHER STRATEGIES

- Seek counselling or spiritual guidance.
- Focus on the skills you used to get through other hard times.
- Give yourself and your loved ones permission to grieve.
- Practice cultural or spiritual customs.

When to Seek Professional Help

Watch for warning signs of extended anxiety. Contact a medical professional if they last more than two to four weeks:

- Trouble with eating and sleeping
- Feeling depressed or hopeless; showing low energy or crying often
- Being anxious and fearful
- Trouble focusing on daily activities
- Recurring thoughts or nightmares
- Avoiding activities or places that are reminders of the event



IF YOU NEED HELP

Call your doctor, 8-1-1 or the
Province of BC's Mental Health Support Line
310-6789 (no area code needed)



RESOURCES

See the latest
FVRD EOC updates.



USEFUL CONTACTS & RESOURCES

FVRD Emergency Operations Centre (<i>if active</i>)	fvrld.ca/EOC or 778-704-0400
Fraser Valley Regional District (general)	fvrld.ca 604-702-5000 or 1-800-528-0061
Fraser Health (public health information)	fraserhealth.ca 1-877-935-5669 or 604-587-3936
Fraser Health (septic field information)	fraserhealth.ca 604-870-7900
Technical Safety BC (Gas/Electrical Inspection)	1-866-566-7233
BC Hydro	1-888-769-3766 or *49376 on your cell phone
Telus	1-888-811-2323
Ministry of Transportation and Transit	1-800-667-5122
Front Counter BC	1-877-855-3222
Telus Health community crisis hotline	1-844-751-2133
Fraser Health Crisis Line	604-951-8855 or 1-877-820-7444
KUU-US Crisis Line	1-800-588-8717
Métis Crisis Line	1-833-638-4722
Kids Help Phone	1-800-668-6868
Emergency Info BC	emergencyinfobc.gov.bc.ca
BC Wildfire Service	www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/wildfire-status
Current Wildfire Situation	wildfiresituation.nrs.gov.bc.ca/map
DriveBC	drivebc.ca
Canadian Red Cross	1-800-863-6582
Insurance Bureau of Canada	1-844-227-5422
Wildlife Conservation Officer Service	1-877-952-7277

The Fraser Valley Regional District has useful resources to help you prepare for an evacuation, get assistance during the evacuation, and in the return home.

fvrld.ca/EOC

