



RE-ENTRY GUIDE

**SAFETY INFORMATION AND RESOURCES
FOR RESIDENTS RETURNING AFTER A WILDFIRE**

September, 2023

INFORMATION FOR RETURNING RESIDENTS

While BC Wildfire Service has assessed the wildfire is no longer a direct danger, the fire remains out of control. The danger may reoccur (caused by new ignitions, lightning strikes, or a change in the prevailing winds, for example) and an Evacuation Order or Alert may need to be issued. BCWS will continue to operate in the area until the wildfire is contained. Give way to all emergency and fire-fighting vehicles. Respect any signs as road conditions may be poor.

BEFORE YOU GO

Ensure you have:

- » A full tank of gas
- » Proper clothing, a flashlight and clean-up materials
- » Medications
- » Water for the drinking & hygiene for next 7 days
- » Food for 7 days, including any special dietary needs

WHEN YOU GET THERE

- » **Water:** Bottled water is recommended. Chlorinate all wells.
- » **Hydro:** If you have questions, or have no service, contact BC Hydro at 1-888-769-3766 (1-888-POWERON) or *49376 on your cell phone
- » **Propane/Natural gas:** If you have questions about your propane, natural gas or oil equipment, please contact your suppliers.
- » **Trees:** Charred trees are unstable and may be a hazard. Trees on slopes may be unstable.
- » **Building:** Fire-damaged buildings may be hazardous.

POSSIBLE HAZARDS

There are still serious risk. Take basic precautions and be aware of hazards to your health and safety in the community. Possible hazards include:

- » Slips, trips, and falls
- » Hazards from unstable structures, open pits, or wet and slippery surfaces
- » Charred trees are unstable
- » Fire damaged buildings
- » Standing chimneys
- » Ash, soot, and demolition dust
- » Hazardous materials such as kitchen and bathroom cleaning products, paint, batteries, and fuel containers, which have been partially damaged or destroyed
- » Pesticides or herbicide containers potentially damaged or destroyed

- » Propane cylinders for heating or from BBQ

HAZARDS IN AREAS AFFECTED BY FIRES

Obvious Hazards	Less Obvious Hazards
Trip Hazards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Wires » Debris 	Fire May Return <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Winds are unpredictable » Lack of electrical power makes new evacuation notices challenging to receive
Falling Hazards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Uncovered wells » Septic tanks 	Dangerous Trees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Falling branches » Weakened trunks lead to falling trees » Damaged roots and falling trees » Ash pits
Sharps <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Nails/screws » Metal edges » Sharp branches 	Toxic Fumes in Debris <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Burning debris may include cyanide, Sulphur dioxide
Spoiled Food <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » In refrigerators & freezers » Damaged tin cans 	Hazardous Materials/Wastes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Septic tank material » Contaminated soils » Polychlorinated bisphenols (PCBs) in transformers on poles and ground, in remnants of fluorescent lights
Inhalation Hazards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Fibreglass fibres » Asbestos fibres » Smoke particulates 	

TAKE PRECAUTIONS AND BE SAFE

- » **Use caution and exercise good judgment** when re-entering a burned fire area. Hazards still exist, including hot spots that can flare up without warning. See “Hazards in Areas Affected by Fire” on the last page for the types of hazards you may experience.
- » **Watch for ash pits and mark them for safety.** Ash pits are holes full of hot ashes, created by burned trees and stumps. You can be seriously burned by falling into ash pits or landing in them with your hands or feet. Warn your family and neighbours to keep clear of the pits.
- » **Inspect the roof and check for smoke and sparks** throughout the home, including the attic. The winds of wildfires can blow burning embers anywhere.
- » **Take precautions while cleaning your property.** You may be exposed to potential health risks from hazardous materials. Debris should be wetted down to minimize health impacts from breathing dust particles. Wear gloves, long-sleeved shirts, and long pants and avoid skin contact. If you get ash on your skin, wash it off as soon as possible. Close gaps in clothing to reduce skin contact.
- » **Wear CSA-approved protective rubber gloves** when working with plumbing fixtures, and sewer piping. They can contain high levels of bacteria. If you suspect a problem with your septic field, contact the Fraser Health Authority.

- » **If you have a propane or natural gas system** and smell propane or natural gas upon entering your home, ventilate your home, leave the premises and contact a qualified gas fitter. Remain off-site until your home has been inspected.
- » **If you have a heating oil tank system**, contact a heating oil supplier to inspect your system before using it. The tank may have shifted or fallen from the stand and fuel lines may have kinked or weakened. Heat from the fire may have caused the tank to warp or bulge. Non-vented tanks are more likely to bulge or show signs of stress. The fire may have loosened or damaged fittings and filters.
- » **Visually check the stability of the trees.** Any tree that has been weakened by fire may be a hazard. Winds are normally responsible for toppling weakened trees. The wind patterns in your area may have changed as a result of the loss of adjacent tree cover.
 - › Look for burns on the tree trunk. If the bark on the trunk has been burned off or scorched by very high temperatures completely around the circumference, the tree will not survive. Where fire has burnt deep into the trunk, the tree should be considered unstable.
 - › Look for burnt roots by probing the ground with a rod around the base of the tree and several feet away from the base. Roots are generally six to eight inches below the surface. If the roots have been burned, you should consider this tree very unstable, and it may be toppled by wind. Look for areas where machines were used to establish fire breaks and may have disturbed tree roots.
 - › A scorched tree is one that has lost part or all its leaves or needles. Healthy deciduous trees are resilient and may produce new branches and leaves as well as sprouts at the base of the tree. Evergreen trees may survive when partially scorched. An evergreen tree that has been damaged by fire is subject to bark beetle attack. Please seek professional assistance from the BC Forest Service concerning measures for protecting evergreens from bark beetle attacks.
 - › You may wish to contract an Arborist or Danger Tree Assessor to determine which trees on your property are unsafe and require Danger Tree Removal.

WATER QUALITY

Wells and Private Systems

If you are on a well, cistern or private water system that has been damaged, assume the water is not safe to drink. Contact your private provider, call HealthLinkBC at 8-1-1 or visit <https://www.fraserhealth.ca/health-topics-a-to-z/drinking-water/private-well-owners> for more information. Here are some considerations:

Disinfect Your Drinking Water

All contaminated drinking water should be disinfected prior to use for the following purposes:

- » Drinking
- » Preparing infant formula and juices
- » Cooking or making ice
- » Washing fruits and vegetables
- » Brushing teeth
- » Washing dishes

Disinfection Methods

- » **Boiling:** boil water at least 1 minute (rolling boil). Preferably, use a kettle so as to reduce the risk of burns. Boiling will not remove the color/cloudiness from the water. Boiling will only kill the harmful microorganisms.
- » **Liquid Chlorine Bleach:** add 4 drops of household bleach per 1 litre of cold water, shake and allow to stand for 30 minutes before using.

- » **Iodine or Chlorine Tablets:** add chlorine or iodine tablets according to the manufacturer’s instructions.
- » **Note:** most household water filters will not remove microbial contamination.

Disinfect Your Well

Prior to resuming normal use of your well, flushing and disinfection of the well must be completed to aid in removing contaminants and other debris that may have entered the well during the fire.

Test Your Water

After the well has been properly disinfected, and the chlorine has been thoroughly flushed out of the system, the water should be tested for the presence of total coliform and E.coli bacteria to confirm that bacteriological contamination has been removed.

For more information on drinking water safety tips for private well owners visit FraserHealth.ca

SEPTIC INFORMATION

Your private septic system may have been damaged by fire, water, or firefighting activities. Potential safety measures include:

- » Contact a sewage disposal professional if you find damage to your septic system.
- » Watch for potential septic tank collapse. Depressions in the ground may be an indication of this.
- » Do not use a damaged system.
- » Do not come into contact with waste that has made its way to the ground surface.

Contact information regarding septic systems contact Health Protection Manager in Environmental Services at Fraser Health.

USEFUL CONTACTS/RESOURCES

FVRD Emergency Operations Centre	www.fvrd.ca/EOC or 778-704-0400
Fraser Health Authority (septic field information)	1-877-935-5669
Technical Safety BC (Gas/Electrical Inspection)	1-866-566-7233
BC Hydro	1-888-769-3766
Telus	1-888-811-2323
Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure	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
Kuus-us Crisis Response Services Line	1-800-588-8717
Metis Crisis Line BC	1-833-638-4722
Kids Help Phone	1-800-668-6868
Emergency Info BC	https://www.emergencyinfobc.gov.bc.ca
BC Wildfire Service	https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/wildfire-status
Current Wildfire Situation	https://wildfiresituation.nrs.gov.bc.ca/map
Kookipi Creek	https://wildfiresituation.nrs.gov.bc.ca/incidents?fireYear=2023&incidentNumber=V11337
DriveBC	https://www.drivebc.ca/
Canadian Red Cross	1-800-863-6582

AIR QUALITY & HEALTH CARE

It is important to note that air quality remains poor as a result of smoke from nearby fire activity. Community Health Centers may have limited operations available for the first few weeks after the evacuations order is lifted.

Residents with the following medical conditions or situations should consider the limited health services that will be available before returning back to the community:

- » A chronic or acute medical condition, such as asthma.
- » Anyone requiring regular primary care, specialist care, laboratory or diagnostic services.
- » Anyone more than 36 weeks pregnant or with a high-risk pregnancy.
- » Anyone receiving cancer treatment, dialysis, or other specialized medical services.
- » Anyone requiring home care, home oxygen, or home health support.
- » Anyone recently discharged from the hospital or who has had a transplant.

Air Quality Advisories

https://weather.gc.ca/airquality/pages/bcaq-003_e.html

MENTAL HEALTH AND STRESS

Smoke, evacuations, loss, floods, wildfires and other natural disasters affect us all. If you are feeling stressed or anxious, you are not alone. To reduce stress and anxiety, practice the following steps:

- » **Prepare:** having a clear emergency plan and kit ready for your family, pets and livestock can ease your mind and allow you to focus on other needs.
- » **Take care:** stress takes a toll on our physical and mental health. Eating well, exercising, and getting enough sleep lowers stress and helps us cope.
- » **Ask for help:** talking helps. Whether it's with family, friends, a doctor, or counsellor. Crisis lines are available to listen and help anytime—not just during a crisis.
- » **Help others:** reach out to the vulnerable. Assisting others can help us regain a sense of purpose and community as we confront challenges together.

Returning home after a wildfire evacuation can be a stressful and traumatic experience. Fear and anxiety are natural reactions to stressful events and can stir up past traumas. To help yourself and your loved ones:

- » Accept offers of help. Seek counselling or spiritual guidance
- » Focus on positive memories and the skills you've used to get through other hard times
- » Give yourself and your loved one's permission to grieve
- » Practice cultural or spiritual customs that bring you comfort

With support, most people recover within a few weeks; however, some will need more time and help to heal. Watch for warning signs of extended anxiety and contact a medical professional or trusted community leader if they last more than two to four weeks.

Warning Signs:

- » 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

CLEAN-UP

If you will be doing the cleaning it is important that you assess all risks to you and your family before beginning. If you are uncertain what to do, consult a professional cleaning company.

- » Take all measures necessary to protect you and your family from physical, chemical, biological hazards.
- » Ensure prompt first aid management for wounds or other exposures.
- » Seek advice from a medical professional when needed.
- » Take special care to monitor children to prevent them from playing in, or potentially ingesting soils, soot, ash, or other materials.
- » Watch your pets or other animals closely and keep them under your control at all times which will prevent them from running into potential hazards around your property. Fire debris and chemicals can make them sick.
- » Wear gloves and goggles, keep children and pets away, and ventilate the area you're cleaning well.
- » Smoke odours can last a long time, and you may need to clean everything several times.
- » Vacuum all surfaces, change heating and air conditioning filters, and have ducts cleaned.
- » Soot/smoke can be removed from painted walls with trisodium phosphate, but wallpaper may not be salvageable.
- » Clean dirt off furniture, removing drawers and scrubbing wooden surfaces; let dry thoroughly.
- » Linoleum flooring may require replacement, but wood and carpet can be vacuumed and washed.
- » Wash fridges and freezers with baking soda/water, vinegar or ammonia to remove odours.
- » Locks and hinges should be taken apart, thoroughly cleaned and oiled.
- » Dispose of hazardous materials (like solvents and garden chemicals) if they show signs of damage. Separate hazardous materials from landfill waste and dispose appropriately.

GARBAGE DISPOSAL & LANDFILL INFORMATION

The [Chaumox Landfill](#) is open Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday from 10:00 am – 5:00 pm.

If further information is required, please contact the FVRD Engineering Department at 604-702-5000.

There are a number of items we are unable to accept at the Chaumox landfill including: **used oil, paints, solvents, asbestos, and bio-hazardous waste**. Please check the Recycling Council of BC [Recyclepedia](#) to find locations of waste disposal companies/landfills in the Region that will accept these items.

CLEAN-UP TIP SHEET

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) listed 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 garbage.
- » 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.

- » Bucket, scrub brush, sponges and mop
- » Work gloves, rubber gloves
- » N95 mask
- » Heavy duty garbage bags
- » bleach-based all-purpose cleaner
- » Laundry detergent
- » Garbage bags
- » Flashlight with 3-AAA batteries included
- » Batteries (if needed)
- » Surface antibacterial wipes
- » Toilet paper
- » Safety glasses

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 you are unsure of how long power was out in your home, contact your utility provider and/or insurer for direction. Do not consume food that may be unsafe to eat due to power loss. Be considerate of the reduced food in the forest for wildlife and the likelihood that animals will be drawn to food waste that is left outside.

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 call BC Hydro at 1-800-BCHYDRO (1-800-224-9376).

Food in your home may be unsafe for consumption, consider the disposal 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.
- » 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 are not 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.

INSURANCE INFORMATION

If you are insured:

- » If your home has a mortgage, call the bank or company that holds this mortgage to let them know about the wildfires as soon as possible.
- » 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.
- » Try to create an inventory of household items, both inside and outside of the buildings, which have been damaged by fire. Photograph or videotape the damage as much as possible.
- » Work with your insurance company to find out what is covered, what is not covered and what may be subject to further discussion.
- » Work with your insurance company and their accredited fire restoration companies to try to restore or rebuild your home.
- » In the event that any of these suggestions conflict with information provided by your insurer, please follow the instructions provided by your insurer.

REPAIRING YOUR HOME

Restoration Contractors

- » 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.
- » If you have questions about a certain contractor, or issues arise:
 - › Visit [Consumer Protection BC](#) or call 1-888-564-9963
 - › Visit [Better Business Bureau](#) call 604-682-2711
- » Look for a reputable contractor to help with restoration.
- » Verify the work of any contractor, roofer, or builder. Deal with only licensed contractors. Beware of potential scams which do occur after emergencies and disasters.
- » Damage to utilities must be repaired under permit and inspected by the appropriate agency.

Potentially Hazardous Materials

- » Damaged or leaking household hazardous materials such as kitchen and bathroom cleaning products, paint, batteries, pesticides, or herbicide containers (like ant or weed killer), and fuel containers. Exposure to these items can have potential for immediate and long-term health effects.
- » Soils may contain potentially hazardous materials.
- » Damaged and leaking home heating oil tanks.
- » Propane cylinders such as those used for BBQ's or heating. Contact local authorities on how to manage these items after a fire.
- » Structures built before the early 1990s could contain asbestos in materials like stucco, siding, plaster, drywall mud, flooring materials, ceiling tiles, insulation, roofing materials, etc.
- » Wildfires deposit large amounts of ash on indoor and outdoor surfaces in nearby areas, which may cause irritation of the skin, nose, and throat.
- » Ash and dust (particularly from burned buildings) may contain toxic chemicals, including asbestos, arsenic, lead, and other heavy metals. Exposure to these chemicals can cause immediate health effect, or a chronic health effect that is seen over time.
- » More information is available in the [Preparedness BC Re-Entry Guide](#)