

RETURNING HOME AFTER AN EMERGENCY

This document contains important information about returning home after an ordered evacuation and the threat of wildfire is over.

BEFORE YOU GO

You are returning to a community where the surrounding area was affected by a wildfire. 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. Services that you are used to or rely on may be limited for some time. You are advised to bring basic necessities with you.

DO YOU HAVE...

- A full tank of gas
- Proper clothing, a flashlight and clean up materials?
- Enough water for the next 7 days
- Food for the next 7 days, including any special dietary needs?
- Any medications you require?

IF YOU SUFFER FROM A RESPIRATORY ILLNESS, IT MAY BE DESIRABLE TO DELAY YOUR RETURN UNTIL AIR QUALITY IMPROVES.

RETURNING HOME

- Give way to all emergency and fire fighting vehicles. 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. Do not re-enter any areas that were heavily damaged or destroyed by the wildfire until the area has been cleared by the local fire authority.
- Use caution and exercise good judgment when re-entering a burned fire area. Hazards may still exist, including hot spots that can flare up without warning. See "Hazards in Areas Affected by Fire" on the next page for the types of hazard 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, long pants and avoid skin contact. If you do get ash on your skin, wash it off as soon as possible.
- Wear 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 Interior Health Authority.
- If you have a propane or natural gas system and smell propane or natural gas upon entering your home, contact a qualified gas fitter, turn off the valve and leave your residence until your system has been inspected. Ventilate your home.
- If you have a heating oil tank system, contact a heating oil supplier for an inspection of your system before using. 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.
- Charred trees are unstable and may be a hazard. Any tree that has been weakened by fire may be a hazard and topple unexpectedly. Winds are normally responsible for blowing down weakened trees. The wind patterns in your area may have changed as a result of the loss of adjacent tree cover. Residents are strongly encouraged to engage with professionals who can provide an assessment of the trees on the property and advise on any hazards.

HAZARDS IN AREAS AFFECTED BY FIRE

OBVIOUS HAZARDS

Trip Hazards

- Wires
- Debris

Below Ground Hazards

- Uncovered wells
- Septic tanks

Sharp Items

- Nails
- Metal edges
- Sharp branches

Smoke on the Highway

- Like fog, but may come on suddenly

Spoiled Food

- In refrigerators
- Damaged tin cans

HAZARDS THAT MAY NOT BE OBVIOUS

Fire May Return

- Winds are unpredictable
- Lack of electrical power makes evacuation notice more challenging

Dangerous Trees

- Falling branches
- Weakened trunks lead to falling trees
- Damaged roots and falling trees

Ash pits

- Holes filled with hot ash

Toxic Fumes in Debris

- Burning debris may include cyanide, Sulphur dioxide

Hazardous Materials/Wastes

- Septic tank material
- Contaminated soils
- PCBs in transformers on poles and ground, in remnants of fluorescent lights

Inhalation Hazards

- Fibreglass fibres
- Smoke particulates
- Contaminated dust

Rockfall

- Burning of trees and roots on slopes above properties

Structure Collapse

- Flooring
- Septic tank

Pressurized Containers

- May explode

IMPORTANT CONTACTS

- FVRD Emergency Operation Centre - 250-352-7701
- Fraser Heath Public Health Unit - 604-702-4906
- Homeowner Protection Office - 1-800-407-7757
- Technical Safety BC (Gas/Electrical Inspect) - 1-866-566-7233
- Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure – 250-828-4220
- Ministry of Forest Lands, Natural Resource, Rural Development and Environment - 250-371-6200
- Fortis BC (Natural Gas) – 1-888-224-2710 - Emergency Line – 1-800-663-9911
- Fortis BC (Electricity) – 1-866-436-7847 - Emergency Line – 1-866-436-7847
- BC Hydro - 1-888-769-3766
- Telus - 1-888-811-2323

USEFUL LINKS

- [Recovering After a Wildfire](#)
- [What to do After a Wildfire](#)
- BC Wildfire Service Claims contact BCWSClaims@gov.bc.ca