



# Returning Home Safely After a Wildfire

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## Introduction

This guidance is for residents returning to homes and properties in areas where wildfires recently occurred.

After a wildfire, homes and properties may be affected by smoke, soot and ash, chemicals, structural damage, and/or water damage. These issues can affect the safety of structures, drinking water, food, soil, and indoor air quality, and may worsen chronic health conditions.

Every situation is different. Assess your specific risks and choose the measures that fit your property.

Return only when authorities say it is safe. If you see or suspect heat, smoke, or active fire on your property, do not enter—call 911.

Continue to monitor outdoor air quality before and after you return home by visiting [Newfoundland and Labrador - Air Quality Health Index \(AQHI\) - Environment Canada](#).

### Insurance Note

Standard home insurance may cover the costs for necessary repairs and cleaning from fire and smoke damage. Make sure you have a plan with your insurance provider and understand the process. Remember to contact the insurance provider associated with any damaged property. This may include your home, vehicles, boats and recreational vehicles, storage sheds and/or home-based businesses.

You may also wish to notify your bank or mortgage company to tell them about the fire and keep them informed of any work being done to restore your property.

# 1

## Before You Return

Local/provincial authorities, working with fire, utilities, and public health, lift evacuation orders once hazards are controlled. Only return when local authorities announce it is safe.

### What to expect

Before returning home think about what you will see, hear and smell in your community upon return to emotionally prepare yourself and your family. Your community may have changed dramatically. Some things to be prepared for:

- Burnt landscapes and trees
- Burnt buildings and vehicles
- Smell of smoke
- Areas covered in ash and soot

### Suggested supplies

Before returning home you may wish to gather the following items to help with the recovery process:

- Camera or video camera to document damage
- Notebook and pen to record damage
- Buckets, mops and sponges for cleaning
- Vinegar, mild detergent, or appropriate cleaning solution for cleaning
- Flashlight
- First aid kit
- Tools
- Fresh food and water
- Copy of the Canadian Red Cross's [Home Inventory Checklist](#)

## 2 Electricity

Avoid contact with damaged or fallen power lines and poles as they pose a serious safety risk. If you see a downed power line, please stay at least 10 metres away, and call Newfoundland Power's emergency outage line at 1-800-474-5711.

Newfoundland Power has restored power to most residential customers, but restoration work continues in some areas.

If you do not have power:

- First, check your main electric panel and breaker — a blown fuse or tripped breaker could be the cause.
- Simply moving any tripped switches all the way to the 'off' position and then to the 'on' position may restore power.

If your power still does not return, please call Newfoundland Power's 24/7 emergency outage line: 1-800-474-5711 -or- Report the outage online at <https://www.newfoundlandpower.com/Outages/Report-a-Power-Outage>

## 3 Entering Your Yard

There may be soot, ash, and other fire debris around your home and yard.

### **Hazards to look for:**

- Slip, trip and fall hazards from unstable structures, damaged trees, collapsing roofs, open pits, or wet and slippery surfaces
- Hot spots (which can still flare up)
- Damaged or fallen power lines, poles, and downed wires
- Ash pits (these are holes in the ground that are hidden by being filled with ash and may still have hot embers)
- Contamination (e.g. fuel spills, water damage, there may also be contamination from heavy metals that may not be visible)
- Sharp objects such as nails, metal, concrete, or wood debris

- Ash, soot, and demolition dust
- Damaged or leaking household hazardous materials such as paint or and fuel containers
- Small or poorly ventilated areas where carbon monoxide may be present from using pumps, generators, or pressure washers. (As a general rule – DO NOT ENTER TIGHT SPACES).
- Damaged or leaking pesticides or herbicide containers like ant or weed killer
- Propane cylinders for heating or from a BBQ
- Household fuel tanks

### **Suggested safety measures:**

- Walk around your property and note hazards; block access to unsafe areas.
- Wet down any fire debris you see. This can lower the risk of breathing in soot and ash particles, which can cause health problems for you and your family.
- Never touch damaged or fallen power lines/poles; contact Newfoundland Power.
- Inspect and, if needed, remove or fence off damaged playground equipment and clean or replace materials contaminated with ash/soot.

### **Cleaning outside:**

Try to gather and contain ash, soot and debris. You want to prevent the spread of these materials and dispose of them safely.

- Pressure wash or scrub exterior surfaces.
- Scrape up ash and soot. Put it in plastic bags or other containers that will keep it from being spread.
- Do not use air hoses or leaf blowers.
- Wash all toys and play structures.
- Use water or biodegradable cleaners for fire retardant residue.
- Replace sand, gravel or other loose materials around playground equipment if there is visible presence of ash, soot or other debris.
- Close the windows of your home when you clean outside, to reduce dust and smoke from entering your home.

## 4 Entering Your Home

Do not enter your home if you notice or suspect any source of heat or smoke. Call 911.

Return to your property only during daylight hours if possible.

### Hazards to look for:

- Ash and dust (particularly from burned, older buildings) may contain toxic chemicals, including asbestos, arsenic, lead, and other heavy metals. Exposure to these chemicals can cause immediate and long-term health effects.
  - Direct skin contact with particulate matter, ash, soot, and fire retardants/suppressants can irritate your eyes, nose, and skin, and should be washed off as soon as possible.
- Check for 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 impacts to your health.

### Suggested safety measures:

- Air out your home first by using a fan, if available, and opening your windows. Only do this if the outdoor air quality is good.
- Wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) when you are cleaning up, including respirator masks (such as an N95), gloves and boots. Vulnerable groups (children, older adults, pregnant people, and those with heart/lung disease) should take extra care and monitor for symptoms.
- Clean surfaces and household items with white vinegar, mild detergent or appropriate cleaning solution, and rinse thoroughly. Clean all surfaces, including inside closets, cupboards, and drawers. Clothing and linens can be washed or dry cleaned. It may require several rinse cycles to thoroughly clean clothing.
- Smoke odours can last a long time. Try placing small saucers of vinegar, vanilla or activated charcoal around your home to absorb odours.
- Use wet methods to clean (mist, wipe, mop); avoid dry sweeping as this can move ash and debris around your house. If possible, close the door to seal off the room you are working in to keep ash and debris from travelling throughout your home.
- Use wet methods to clean (mist, wipe, mop); avoid dry sweeping as this can move ash and debris around your house.
- Use vacuums that have a HEPA filter; change HEPA filters often.
- For suspected asbestos or heavy metal contamination (e.g. lead from old paint), hire qualified professionals.

- Take special care not to remove soiled items, clothing, personal protective equipment such as safety shoes or boots, etc. from the area without first thoroughly cleaning.
- During demolition or heavy cleanup nearby, stay indoors, close doors/windows, and minimize HVAC intake of outdoor air (heat pumps are acceptable).

## 5 Water

Water quality and quantity can be affected by wildfires and fire suppression efforts.

- Follow any boil water or non-consumption advisories in place.
  - When a **boil water advisory** is in effect, boiled water should be used for drinking, preparing foods, brushing teeth, or cleaning food contact surfaces.
  - When a **non-consumption advisory** is in effect, water should not be used for drinking, cooking and consumption. Alternate sources of water such as bottled water or sources known to be safe would be acceptable. This water can still be used for washing, cleaning, bathing and other household uses.
- After returning from an evacuation, you should flush your water lines to remove stagnant water by running all hot and cold water taps for five minutes.
- Private wells: You should not drink, cook, or brush your teeth with well water until your well is inspected, disinfected, and tested. If you notice an odd appearance or odour, you should use an alternate water source for bathing or showering. This water can still be used for cleaning and other household uses. Heat/smoke may damage well components.
  - Use bottled water or water from a safe alternative source until your well is confirmed safe.
  - To arrange for well testing, contact the Department of Environment and Climate Change at [groundwatersection@gov.nl.ca](mailto:groundwatersection@gov.nl.ca), 709-729-2539 or 709-729-1671, and your nearest Government Service Centre.
  - If there is visible damage to your drilled well, contact a licensed well driller to assess the damage and make repairs (<https://www.gov.nl.ca/ecc/waterres/groundwater/well/well-drilling-license-holders/>)
  - For more information: <https://www.gov.nl.ca/ecc/files/Wildfires-Wells-1.pdf>



## 6 Food

- Check food for signs of going bad, even if it was stored in the fridge and there were no power outages at your home. Also, check if any foods were exposed to ash or smoke residue.
- Spoiled food may not look contaminated. Remember: **when in doubt, throw it out**. Consider the following:
  - Discard perishables if refrigerator/freezer temperatures exceeded 4 °C (40 °F) for more than two hours or if powerout duration is unknown.
  - Discard food/medications/cosmetics exposed to heat, smoke, chemicals, or firefighting water.
- Only undamaged, commercially prepared foods in sealed, unopened, airtight, waterproof cans, jars or pouches are entirely safe to use. Clean and disinfect canned foods and examine the seal to confirm it was not compromised from the exposure to heat before opening.
- Garden fruits and vegetables and local berries may be contaminated with soot, ash or fire retardants. These should be thrown out if visibly contaminated.

Please contact your insurance provider to discuss required documentation to replace food items.

### Fridge and freezers

Decayed food items in your fridge or freezer may pose a health risk. Before you assess your fridge or freezer, make sure you discuss with your insurance provider.

If you find mould, contact your insurance provider to see if you need to replace your fridge or freezer and if you have coverage for this.

If you are keeping your fridge or freezer, please clean, disinfect, and deodorize your appliances once you have discarded the spoiled food. Below are some tips for safely cleaning your appliance:

- Unplug the fridge and freezer
- Rinse or blow out the coils and compressors
- To clean the inside, use soap and water and then rinse with clean water
- Sanitize the inside with a bleach/water mixture made by mixing a teaspoon of ordinary household bleach for every 4 cups of water.
- Leave the doors of the fridge and freezer open to help them dry out.

- Once the appliance is dry, reconnect the power.
- Wait until the inside temperature of your fridge has reached 4°C before restocking it with food.
- Wait until your freezer temperature is at -18°C before restocking it with food.

## Dishwasher

If you find mould in your dishwasher, please clean appropriately then run a regular hot temperature cycle or a sanitization cycle.

# 7 Waste and Environmental Management

It is crucial to ensure proper handling of waste and contaminated materials and hazardous waste; when in doubt, contact a qualified professional.

- If you have a home with heating oil tank(s), propane, or natural gas, check your tank, lines, and appliances for damage. If there is a spill, contain the area and call 709-772-2083 or 1-800-563-2444.
- Double-bag ash; keep out of storm drains and waterways.
- Follow local rules and regulations for household hazardous waste (cleaners, pesticides/herbicides, solvents, aerosols). Keep in original/compatible containers and take to designated depots. <https://www.gov.nl.ca/ecc/env-protection/waste/>
- Septic systems: If there are signs of damage to your onsite sewage disposal system, such as leaks, soil depressions or exposed or broken pipes, contact a licensed sewage disposal professional or an Environmental Health Officer to assess your system. Do not use the system if you suspect damage.
- Use authorized streams for asbestos/chemically impacted debris; involve Qualified Professionals when contamination is suspected.
- If there is a water damage in your home, wear personal protective equipment when cleaning (respirator mask such as an N95, gloves and boots). Clean with soap and water first, then disinfect (e.g., household bleach solution) where appropriate.
- Dry all wet items as soon as possible; use dehumidifiers to reduce indoor humidity and limit mould growth.

## 8

## Deceased Pets/Animals

- The loss of animals is distressing. Reach out to local mental health supports, your veterinary team, or community services if you need assistance.
- Wear gloves, practice hand hygiene, and secure remains to avoid attracting other animals.
- If the animal is your pet, contact your veterinarian for guidance on respectful handling, transport, and aftercare options such as cremation or burial.
- For guidance on disposing of deceased livestock, please see: <https://www.gov.nl.ca/ecc/files/env-protection-waste-guidancedocs-gd-deadanimals.pdf>
- To have a provincial wildlife officer safely remove a deceased wild animal in Newfoundland and Labrador, you should contact Regional Services, Forestry and Wildlife Branch, Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture at 709-729-4180 or 709-685-7273.

## 9

## Mental Health

- Wildfires and evacuations can cause significant emotional stress. Reach out to local mental health services if you need help for yourself or your family.
- Start with simple routines, limit smoke exposure, lean on family and friends, and take breaks from distressing news.
- You can connect to same-day Doorways counselling, peer support options, and community programs. Visit <https://nl.bridgethegap.ca/> for a directory of services in your area.
- You may also contact **811** for guidance and connection to Mental Health and Addictions services.

## 10 Insurance Checklist

- If you haven't already done so, contact your insurance provider and start a claim. Your insurance provider will help you navigate the claims process.
- Create a list of all damaged belongings. The Canadian Red Cross's [Home Inventory Checklist](#) can assist with creating this list.
- Photograph and videotape damage as much as possible. If available, compile photos from before and after the incident with as much information as possible. Confirm with your insurance provider if you need to keep any ruined or damaged possessions.
- Collect proofs of purchase, photos, receipts, and warranties. This helps determine the make and model of damaged property.
- Keep all receipts related to cleanup.
- Ask your insurance provider about living expenses coverage.

# 11

## Recovering Important Documents

Item	Who to Contact for Replacement
Birth certificates, marriage certificates, death certificates	<p>Department of Government Modernization and Service Delivery</p> <p>Vital Statistics Division</p> <p>P.O. Box 8700 St. John's, NL A1B 4J6</p> <p><b>Tel:</b> (709) 729-3308</p> <p><b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:vstats@gov.nl.ca">vstats@gov.nl.ca</a></p> <p><b>Office Location:</b> 149 Smallwood Drive, Mount Pearl</p>
Drivers licences and vehicle registration information	<p>Department of Government Modernization and Service Delivery</p> <p>Motor Registration Division</p> <p><a href="#">Contact Us</a></p> <p><b>Locations</b></p> <p><b>Mount Pearl:</b> 149 Smallwood Drive</p> <p><b>Bay Roberts:</b> 25 Bareneed Road</p> <p><b>Clarenville:</b> 8A Myer's Avenue, Suite 102</p> <p><b>Corner Brook:</b> 84 Mount Bernard Avenue, Sir Richard Squires Building</p> <p><b>Gander:</b> 230 Airport Blvd, Fraser Mall, Gander</p> <p><b>Grand Falls-Windsor:</b> 3 Cromer Avenue, Provincial Building</p> <p><b>Happy Valley-Goose Bay:</b> 163 Hamilton River Road</p> <p><b>Labrador City:</b> 118 Humphrey Road, Bruno Plaza</p> <p><b>Marystown:</b> 1 Harris Drive, Industrial Park</p> <p><b>St. Anthony:</b> 6-8 North Street</p> <p><b>Stephenville:</b> 35 Alabama Drive</p>

Item	Who to Contact for Replacement
<b>Land titles and deeds</b>	<p>Department of Government Modernization and Service Delivery</p> <p>Registry of Deeds</p> <p>P.O. Box 8700 St. John's, NL A1B 4J6</p> <p><b>Tel:</b> (709) 729-3302 <b>Fax:</b> (709) 729-0232 <b>Courier Address:</b> 59 Elizabeth Avenue <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:snlregistryofdeeds@gov.nl.ca">snlregistryofdeeds@gov.nl.ca</a></p>
<b>Medical Care Plan (MCP) card</b>	<p>Department of Health and Community Services Medical Care Plan (MCP)</p> <p><b>Avalon region:</b> (709) 758-1600 <b>All other regions, including Labrador:</b> (709) 292-4000 <b>Toll free:</b> 1-866-449-4459 or 1-800-563-1557</p>
<b>Medical records</b>	<p>Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services</p> <p>Visit <a href="#">MyHealthNL</a> or request copies of your health records through the <a href="#">Release of Information (ROI) program</a>. <a href="#">Fees apply</a>.</p>
<b>Income and social support documents</b>	<p>Department of Families and Affordability Income Support Program</p> <p>P.O. Box 8790 St. John's, NL A1B 5E4</p> <p><b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:incomesupport@gov.nl.ca">incomesupport@gov.nl.ca</a> <b>Toll free:</b> 1-877-729-7888</p>
<b>Social Insurance Number (SIN) cards, Canada Pension Plan documents, Employment Insurance documents</b>	Service Canada
<b>Military discharge papers</b>	Veterans Affairs Canada
<b>Passports</b>	Passport Canada
<b>Indigenous status cards</b>	Indigenous Services Canada
<b>Citizenship papers</b>	Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
<b>Income tax records</b>	Revenue Canada

Item	Who to Contact for Replacement
<b>Canada Savings Bonds</b>	Canada Savings Bonds PO Box 2770, Station D Ottawa, ON K1P 1J7
<b>Divorce papers</b>	Supreme Court of Newfoundland and Labrador  <b>General Inquiries E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:inquiries@supreme.court.nl.ca">inquiries@supreme.court.nl.ca</a> The Court currently requires that you book an appointment before coming to the Registry. Appointments may be booked <a href="#">online</a> .
<b>Wills</b>	Family lawyer or estate lawyer
<b>Animal registration papers</b>	Local municipal government office
<b>Insurance policies</b>	Insurance provider and/or broker
<b>Bank cards, documents and statements</b>	Local bank branch
<b>Credit cards</b>	Issuing credit card company
<b>Stocks</b>	Issuing company or lawyer

