



Returning to Your Neighborhood

Visiting your property for the first time since the evacuation will be an emotional experience and we want you to know that you are not alone—there are many people and agencies here to help you. The loss or substantial damage of a physical home, a shelter, a place of security, filled with memories, is difficult to bear. For many, a sense of home comes from neighbors and from the wider community. The building you called home may be gone or hard to recognize, but your community is with you to help you recover and rebuild. We extend our deepest sympathy to you and your family and we want you to know that we are committed to assuring you have access to the services and support you need. Please familiarize yourself with the information in this packet. It contains important details about the hazards of entering an area that has been impacted by a fire.

What Has Occurred in Your Neighborhood Since the Fire

Crews have removed propane tanks, utility lines, and environmental hazards. Utility providers have gone through to shut off gas, electrical and water services to properties where hazards exist.

Once evacuation orders have been lifted and you have received official notification from the City of Santa Rosa that it is safe to re-enter your fire-impacted area, you may proceed to your property.

What to Expect When You Arrive in Your Neighborhood

The Condition of Your Property: After a fire, many dangers remain and if you choose to enter your property, you are doing so at your own risk. For your safety, building inspectors have inspected homes that appear damaged from the exterior. When visiting your property, you may find it in one of the following conditions:

No Structure Remaining – There is no structure standing on your property.

Partial Structure Remaining – Some homes have sections of walls or chimneys still standing. These structures are not secure and pose an immediate risk of collapse. If you choose to enter the property, you are doing so at your own risk.

Standing Structure – The structure on your property is standing and is safe to enter. Although these properties may look intact, they may have sustained smoke, water or other damage. Structures that do not show damage from the exterior have not been inspected.

Property Tagging

Upon returning to your property, you will see one of three different tags – a Green Tag, a Yellow Tag or a Red Tag.

- **Green:** The Green Tag means the structure is “Safe for Occupancy.” Your property is safe to live in.
- **Yellow:** The Yellow Tag means the structure is “Habitable but Repairs are Necessary.” Your property is safe to live in, but your home needs repairs that will require permits from the City.
- **Red:** The Red Tag means “Limited Entry” or “Do Not Enter.” Red Tag properties are NOT SAFE to live in or on. Red Tags with “Limited Entry” allow you to access the property to search for valuables at your own risk. Red Tags labeled with “Do Not Enter” mean you may NOT enter the property for any purpose.

Taking Care of Yourself and Your Family

Emergency Order of the Sonoma County Health Officer: Sonoma County Health Officer Dr. Sundari Mase signed a Health Order on Sept. 29, 2020. The Health Order requires residents to use personal protective equipment in burn areas and prohibits residents from starting cleanup before receiving permission from the County of Sonoma's Department of Health Services, Environmental Health. The full Health Order is available for review online at: [SoCoEmergency.org](https://www.socoemergency.org).

Looking Through the Remains of Your Property: Sifting for valuables is permitted but not recommended for health reasons. Small scale sifting through ashes to locate remaining personal items will not impact your ability to get financial assistance. Please be advised that digging, piling materials up or moving large pieces on or off the property can jeopardize your eligibility for state and federally sponsored cleanup and could put your health at risk. Be aware that ash and debris are likely to contain hazardous substances.

If you choose to search through the remains of your home, wear proper protective equipment and take the following precautions:

- Wear sturdy shoes, long sleeve shirts and long pants to avoid skin contact and puncture risks
- Wear protective gear including gloves, protective masks and goggles
- Keep children and pets away
- Anything in contact with ash should be sanitized and cleaned

- Asbestos, heavy metals, by-products of plastic combustion and various other chemicals may be present in on your property and in your neighborhood
- Walk around the perimeter before entering, noting any debris and structure that could fall or cause injury

Know that You Have the Right to Privacy: The media has helped our community to stay connected and informed during this devastating fire; part of that coverage has included personal stories about how people’s lives have been impacted. While members of the media do have the right to access the re-entry area, please know that it is your choice whether to engage with them and you have the right to request your privacy if you so choose.

Emotional Support is important for all who experienced this disaster. The emotional toll can be devastating and further compounded by the financial strains of losing your home, business, or personal property. Profound sadness, grief, and anger are normal reactions to an event such as this. During your return to your neighborhood, emotional support services will be available including mental health providers and clergy. For additional support, please call 2-1-1 to be connected with providers in your area or call the County of Sonoma Warm line at 707-565-2652 for free and private support 7 days a week from 10:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m.

Disposing of Hazardous Materials

The County of Sonoma and City of Santa Rosa, in partnership with the State of California’s Office of Emergency Services (Cal-OES), will be coordinating a cleanup effort of private properties that ensures safe disposal. This will be in both the incorporated and unincorporated areas. Ash and debris from burned buildings and homes can contain toxic substances due to the presence of synthetic and hazardous materials.

Household hazardous waste must be handled separately from other burn debris and may not go into local landfills. Residents are strongly urged to leave all the debris in place and are encouraged to NOT remove items from their property. Household hazardous waste includes unused or leftover portions of products used in your home that contain toxic chemicals. Products labeled caution, warning, danger, poison, toxic, flammable or corrosive are considered hazardous waste.

Recovery and Rebuilding

Visiting your neighborhood in the aftermath of the fire is a difficult and yet important step in recovery and preparing for what comes next. Our collective goal is to make rebuilding your home or business as smooth and clear a process as possible.

We are with you and together we will recover and rebuild our community.



Important Contacts

Recovery website: [SRCity.org/GlassFireRecovery](https://srcity.org/GlassFireRecovery)

Rebuilding questions: 707-543-4649 | rebuild@srcity.org

Santa Rosa Police Department: 707-528-5222

Sonoma County Department of Health: 707-565-6700

Sonoma County Animal Services: 707-565-7100

Sonoma County Community Hotline: 2-1-1

American Red Cross: 707-577-7600



HAZARD ADVISORY

YOU ARE ENTERING A HAZARDOUS AREA

ENTER AT YOUR OWN RISK

In the burn area, you will encounter dangerous conditions and will be exposed to toxic materials that may include but are not limited to:

- Embers /hot ash
- Hazardous materials, including: ash, asbestos, heavy metals, oils, fire retardants, pesticides and other hazardous materials
- Puncture hazards, including: broken pipes, exposed nails, broken glass, damaged structural elements
- Potential explosive hazards including: propane tanks, ammunition, and solvents
- Slippery surfaces
- Toxic airborne particles
- Uneven ground
- Unstable structures

Wear protective gear and minimize time of exposure



County of Sonoma Department of Health Services

Environmental Health

625 5th Street, Santa Rosa, CA 95404

707-565-6565, Fax 707-565-6525

www.sonoma-county.org/eh



Safety When Returning To Your Home or Business after a Fire

A fire in a home can cause serious damage, and in some cases total loss. The building and many of the items in your home or business may have been badly damaged by flames, heat, smoke, and water.

You may find things that the fire did not burn up but are now ruined by smoke and soggy with water used to put out the flames. Anything that you want to save or reuse will need to be carefully cleaned.

Firefighters may have cut holes in the walls of the building to look for hidden flames. They may have cut holes in the roof to let out heat and smoke. Cleanup will take time and patience.

General Safety Tips: USE CAUTION!

- Wear sturdy shoes (steel toes and shanks are recommended), a mask, and protective gear when sorting through possessions. Anything in contact with ash should be sanitized and cleaned. Sorting through/cleaning burn debris is not recommended for health reasons.
- Hazardous chemicals and conditions may be present.
- Inspect propane tanks for visible damage before turning on.
- Be aware of slip, trip, fall, and puncture hazards.

It is important to understand the risk to your health and safety even after the fire is out. The soot and dirty water left behind could make you ill.

Be very careful if you touch any fire-damaged items. Ask the advice of the fire department, local building officials, your insurance agent, and restoration specialists before starting to clean or make repairs.

Do not eat, drink, or breathe in anything that has been near the flames, smoke, soot, or water used to put the fire out.

Safety

Fire ash may be irritating to the skin, nose, and throat may cause coughing and/or nose bleeds. Fine particles can be inhaled deeply into lungs and may aggravate asthma and may make it difficult to breathe.

- **Refrain from cleaning ash and fire debris until professional hazardous material cleanup services are secured. Seek professional damage and debris removal/restoration services.**
- When exposure to dust or ash cannot be avoided, use a well-fitted NIOSH-certified air-purifying respirator N-95 mask. Due to COVID-19, only N-95 masks that do not have one-way valves should be used.
- Children should not be in the vicinity while cleanup is in progress. Even if care is exercised, it is easy to stir up ash that may contain hazardous substances.
- Clean ash off house pets and other domesticated animals if they have been in contaminated

areas.

- It is best to not allow pets in these areas due to the potential risk to their health and their ability to spread outside of contaminated areas.
- Wear gloves, long-sleeved shirts, and long pants to avoid skin contact. Goggles are recommended. Contact with wet ash may cause chemical burns or irritation on skin. Change your shoes and clothing prior to leaving the decontamination site, to avoid tracking ash into your car, home, etc.

Water

Do not use your water to wash dishes, brush your teeth, wash and prepare food, wash your hands, make ice, or make baby formula if you suspect, or have been told, it is contaminated. Safe water for drinking, cooking, and personal hygiene includes bottled, boiled, or treated water.

If your drinking water well was impacted by the fire, it is recommended that you seek professional well services and notify your local permitting agency if applicable.

Handwashing

Keeping hands clean during an emergency helps prevent the spread of germs. If your tap water is not safe to use, wash your hands with soap and water that has been boiled or disinfected or use a large water jug that contains clean water. To wash your hands properly:

- Wet your hands with clean, running water and apply soap.
- Rub your hands together (20 seconds) to make a lather and scrub them well.
- Rinse your hands well under running water.
- Dry your hands using a clean towel or air them dry.

If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

Food Safety

Foods exposed to fire can be compromised. Reheating food that has become contaminated will not make it safe - When in doubt, throw it out!

- Food in cans, jars, bottles, and other permeable containers may appear to be okay, but if they have been close to the heat of a fire, they may no longer be safe. Heat from a fire can activate food spoilage bacteria. If the heat is extreme, the cans or jars themselves can split or rupture, rendering the food unsafe.
- Foods that are exposed to toxic fumes and chemicals should be thrown away. Toxic fumes can permeate the packaging and contaminate the food. Any type of food stored in permeable packaging (cardboard, plastic wrap, etc.) should be thrown away. Discard any raw foods stored outside the refrigerator such as potatoes or fruit that could be contaminated by fumes.
- Food stored in refrigerators or freezers can also become contaminated by fumes. Chemicals used to fight fires contain toxic materials and can contaminate food and cookware.

Food facilities need to seek Environmental Health Services prior to reopening your facility. Contact Environmental Health at 707-565-6565.

Cleaning and Sanitizing

Cleaning and sanitizing your household after an emergency is important to help prevent the spread of illness and disease.

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Clean and sanitize surfaces in a four-step process:

- Wash with soap and hot, clean water.
- Rinse with clean water.
- Sanitize by immersing for 1 minute in a solution of 1 cup (8 oz/240 mL) of unscented household chlorine bleach in 5 gallons of clean water.
- Allow to air dry.

Please remember the following safety tips when cleaning:

- **NEVER** mix bleach with ammonia or any other cleaner.
- Wear rubber or other non-porous boots, gloves, and eye protection.
- Try not to breathe in product fumes. If using products indoors, open windows and doors to allow fresh air to enter.



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Protecting Public Health from Fire Ash

All persons accessing burned structures should be aware of the potential hazards associated with those sites. Cleanup efforts at these sites may expose you to ash, soot, and fire decomposition products that can cause health effects including, but not limited to, eye/skin/respiratory irritation. If possible, try to **AVOID** direct contact with ash. If you get ash on your skin, in your eyes, or in your mouth, wash it off as soon as you can, with clean or sterile water.

Ash from burned structures is generally more hazardous than forest ash. Fire ash contains microscopic particles (dust, dirt, soot) that can be deposited on indoor and outdoor surfaces and can also be inhaled if the ash becomes airborne. Unless tested, the ash is not classified as a hazardous waste, however it may contain traces of hazardous chemicals such as metals (lead, cadmium, nickel and arsenic), asbestos (from older homes or other buildings), perfluorochemicals (from degradation of non-stick cookware), flame retardants, and caustic materials. For these reasons, it is advisable to be cautious and avoid any unnecessary exposure to the ash.

Health Effects of Ash: Fire ash may be irritating to the skin, nose, and throat, and may cause coughing and/or nose bleeds. Fine particles can be inhaled deeply into lungs and may aggravate asthma and make it difficult to breathe. If the ash contains asbestos, nickel, arsenic or cadmium, then exposure is a particular concern because these substances can cause cancer. Because the substances in the ash vary, it is always best to be cautious.

High-Risk Persons: People with asthma or other lung diseases, pregnant women, and the elderly or very young should exercise special caution because they may be more susceptible to health effects from the ash.

Children: Do not allow children to play in ash. Wash and clean all children's toys carefully after possible contamination. Children should not be in the vicinity while cleanup is in progress. Even if care is exercised, it is easy to stir up ash that may contain hazardous substances. In addition, the exploratory behavior of children may result in direct contact with contaminated materials.

Pets: Clean ash off house pets and other domesticated animals if they have been in contaminated areas. However, it is best to not allow pets in these areas due to the potential risk to their health and their ability to spread outside of contaminated areas.

Clothing: Covering clothing is recommended, when in proximity to ash. Wear gloves, long-sleeved shirts, and long pants to avoid skin contact, whenever possible. Goggles are recommended. Contact with wet ash may cause chemical burns or irritation on skin. Change your shoes and clothing prior to leaving the decontamination site, to avoid tracking ash into your car, residence, etc.

Masks: When exposure to dust or ash cannot be avoided, use a well-fitted NIOSH-certified air-purifying respirator mask. A mask rated N-95 is much more effective than unrated dust or surgical masks in blocking ash particles. Due to COVID-19, only N-95 masks that do not have one-way valves should be used. Although smaller sized masks may appear to fit a child's face, manufacturers do not recommend their use for children. If your child is in an area that warrants wearing a mask, you should remove them from that area to an environment with cleaner air.



County of Sonoma

www.SoCoEmergency.org

Water Wells and Septic Systems

As an owner of a septic system or private domestic water well that may be damaged by a wildfire, you may have some concerns about fire related impacts to your septic and well water systems.

Sonoma County Environmental Health (EH) recommends the well owner perform a visual inspection of their well and water system, including the piping and plumbing that provide water to and throughout your home. Items that you should check include:

- Damaged and melted or exposed electrical wiring
- Damaged and melted PVC casing, liner or pipe
- Damaged well houses, pressure tanks and equipment such as chlorinators, water treatment equipment and electronic controls
- Damage to pressure tanks which could have been caused by exposure to excessive heat
- Damage to storage tanks, vents, and overflow pipes
- Debris, such as ash and sediment entering uncovered wells or storage tanks.

Exposed electrical wiring to the well poses a significant electrical safety hazard with potential for an electrical short to the metal casing. If the electrical wiring has been damaged by fire, do not handle the wiring or touch the casing.

If your well has been damaged by fire, contact a local licensed and bonded well constructor or pump installer to determine the extent of the damages and what must be done to either repair or decommission the well. If you think a fire may have damaged your water supply, bring bottled water back with you when you return to your home.

Water Taste and Odors

You may notice that your water tastes or smells earthy, smoky, or burnt. If so, you may need to thoroughly flush your water lines.

Inside Your Home

To the extent you can, visually check the water-supply system, including plumbing, for any damage, signs of leaks, or changes in operation. You should check to see if your well and plumbing system maintained positive pressure during the fire. This can be done by simply turning on a faucet in the household to see if water flows. You should not hear any air being released from the faucet. The flow of water should be steady and uninterrupted. If you do hear air escaping from the faucet with water intermittently spurting out when it is turned on, that is an indication that your well and household plumbing had a loss of pressure and may have been damaged.

If You've Had Loss of Water Pressure

If your visual inspection shows that there was a loss of pressure or the water system has been damaged, it is likely that your water may be contaminated with bacteria. Damaged components should be repaired or replaced. Anytime a water system loses pressure, the water should be tested for the presence of bacteria before it is used for drinking or cooking. Anytime the well or water system is repaired, it should be disinfected after a repair is made and then tested to ensure the water is safe for drinking or cooking.

Testing Your Well for Bacteria

When testing drinking water for the presence of bacteria, it is necessary to collect a sample and deliver it to a CA-certified laboratory. For a list of local laboratories please visit <https://sonomacounty.ca.gov/Health/Environmental-Health/Water-Quality/Water-Testing/>. Bacteria samples must be collected in an approved container provided by the laboratory. When collecting a sample, follow the instructions that come with the bottle and return the sample bottle to the laboratory in the recommended time.

Using Your Water While You Wait for Test Results

You can use your water for showering and flushing toilets. Take care to avoid swallowing water from showers or baths. You should not use your water for drinking or cooking purposes unless you have boiled or disinfected it. This caution includes not washing dishes or other cooking utensils in it. While you are waiting to receive the results of bacteria testing, you can boil the water you will be using for drinking and cooking for at least 1 minute at a full rolling boil.

Well Disinfection

You can also disinfect your well and water system while waiting for sample results. If the well tests positive for the presence of coliform bacteria, you should have the well and water system disinfected. Instructions for disinfecting wells can be found below. Additional information may be found on our [Well Water Quality](https://sonomacounty.ca.gov/Health/Environmental-Health/Water-Quality/Well-Water-Quality/) page at <https://sonomacounty.ca.gov/Health/Environmental-Health/Water-Quality/Well-Water-Quality/>. Wells must be maintained to prevent health hazards. Take steps to ensure your water is safe to drink after an emergency.

Disinfection of Private Domestic Water Wells

- Disinfection of a well is recommended to eliminate disease causing organisms. A well should be disinfected following a repair, maintenance or replacement of the pump or if the power has been off for an appreciable period of time possibly causing the pressure tank to lose pressure and the distribution system to back siphon into the well causing possible contamination.

- Use only a freshly opened bottle of liquid chlorine, as the solution weakens with exposure to air.
- It is advisable to premix the liquid chlorine into a 5-gallon container prior to pouring the disinfectant into the well. **The recommended dosage for a 50.0PPM chlorine residual is 2-3 cups of 8.25% liquid chlorine for a standard well.**
- Mix thoroughly after adding the chlorine solution. If the well is deep, turn the pump on and off to surge the well.
- Allow the system to rest overnight for 24 hours.
- To reduce excess chlorine, pump the well several times then turn on all the outside faucets until the chlorine odor is at an acceptable level.
- Take a bacteriological sample into a certified private laboratory for analysis. If the test results for total coliform indicate unsafe conditions, then repeat disinfection procedure.

Damage to Wells and Septic Systems

Wells and onsite wastewater (septic) systems have most of their functional components below ground and are typically more resistant to fire damage. However, it is important to inspect your well and septic system for damage to PVC piping above or near the ground that may have been impacted by heat. If your well or septic system has been damaged, or is malfunctioning, discontinue use and refer to the following literature on how to evaluate your well and septic system:

Wells: <https://sonomacounty.ca.gov/Rebuild/Permits/PDFs/Water-Well-Recommendations-and-Requirements-After-Wildfire-Storms/>

Septic Systems: <https://sonomacounty.ca.gov/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=2147553693>

For general information on rebuilding wells and septic system please visit:

<https://sonomacounty.ca.gov/Rebuild/Permits/Well-Septic-Sewer/>

Contact Us

If you have any questions regarding this document or your health and safety with regards to returning to your home, please contact Environmental Health at 707-565-6565. For the most recent updates on local fires, evacuation information, returning to your home, the debris removal program and rebuilding, please visit www.SoCoEmergency.org.