AFTER THE FIRE
WHAT TO DO NEXT

PREVENT PREPARE PROTECT

NSW FIRE BRIGADES
Helping to Make Your Community Safer
What to do in the hours and days after a fire occurs

This brochure contains important advice from the New South Wales Fire Brigades to help you through this difficult time.

Your home has just been destroyed or seriously damaged by fire.

While understanding and accepting what has happened will be difficult, there are some things you can do, starting now, to begin rebuilding your life and your home.

There are organisations and people who will help you through the process. Your starting point is to secure and protect your property.

If you need counselling or professional advice, contact someone from the Counselling Services section in the Yellow Pages.
YOUR REACTION IS NORMAL

It is normal to feel unsettled and disrupted for a while. You may be able to overcome any problems yourself but don’t be afraid to ask for help.

After a crisis it is often easier to talk to someone who is not involved and is trained to listen.

The NSW Fire Brigades has the services of a full-time Salvation Army Chaplain, who can provide counselling and help you find emergency accommodation. This service is free and available 24 hours a day. Telephone (02) 9265 2736.

The Australian Counselling Association may also be able to help you search for a counsellor in your area. Telephone 1300 784 333 or visit www.theaca.net.au
If you need to enter your home, check with the Fire Officer in charge of the scene and also the Police, if they are present. They will advise you if it is safe to enter. Ensure you follow all instructions they give you. You may need to get advice from a structural engineer.

There will be many things that you will want to retrieve. Focus however on finding the following priority items:

- Identification
- Credit cards
- Legal documents
- Medications
- Eyeglasses, hearing aids or personal aids
- Personal items such as jewellery, photo albums, videos
- Insurance information
- Wallets and other valuables
- Car keys

You may need to contact your insurance company before removing any items.
WHAT TO DO NOW

You need to protect your home from weather, theft or vandalism

> Lock and secure all entry points. The NSW Fire Brigades firefighters may be able to help you with this.
> Contact your insurance company.

If you are a tenant

Contact your real estate agent or landlord as soon as possible.

If you are a Department of Housing tenant telephone the 24 hour help line on 1300 468 746.

If you are going to leave your home

> Contact your local Police Station and let them know that the property will be left vacant.
> Check with your insurance company to see if they will advance you money for essentials and accommodation.

CAUTIONS

Before reoccupying your home

> Wiring should be checked by a licensed electrician.
> Roofs and floors may be weakened by structural damage.
> Unsafe hazardous materials may be present e.g. asbestos.
> Food, drink and medicines exposed to heat and smoke should be discarded.
IF YOU ARE INSURED

Call your insurance company, agent or broker as soon as possible.
Find out what actions you need to take and information you need to provide.
Don’t throw away damaged items in case they need to be assessed.
Talk to your insurance company before doing any cleaning or arranging any
repairs. Most insurers have a range of specialists who can do these tasks for you.
It is not uncommon for an insurance company to investigate a claim.
Try to remember events leading up to the fire. Make a note of them
and be prepared to answer questions.

Important notes to remember for my claim purposes

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WHO TO CONTACT

You should contact the following people who may be able to help you through some of the steps you need to take after a fire.

Call these people and let them know what happened. They can help you through some of the steps you need to take after a fire.

- family and friends
- your insurance company
- your bank or mortgage company
- your employer
- your child’s school
- post office
- electricity supplier
- local council
- gas supplier
If you are insured, your home insurer may organise and pay for cleaning up, securing your home and removal of debris - contact them before cleaning or arranging repairs. If you are not insured, depending on the extent of damage, you may need to hire professional fire and water damage restorers. Look in the Yellow Pages or search through the Yellow Pages website www.yellowpages.com.au under Carpet &/or Furniture Cleaning & Protection.

**Kitchen**

> Discard food, drinks and medicines exposed to the fire, smoke or water.
> Wash tins and jars in detergent and water. Don’t eat tinned food if the tin has bulged or rusted.
> Don’t refreeze thawed food.
> Wash cooking pots and pans with detergent and water, then rinse and polish with a fine-powdered cleaner.
> Have all electrical appliances checked by a qualified service person before you use them.

**Walls, floors and ceilings**

> Clean soot and smoke from walls with a mild soap or detergent.

**Furniture and furnishings**

> Rugs and carpets should be dried as fast as possible because they will begin to rot.
> Scrub furniture with cleaner and a brush and dry thoroughly in the shade where there is good ventilation.
> Remove drawers to dry and to stop them from warping.

**Leather and books**

> Wipe leather goods with a damp cloth, then a dry cloth. Stuff purses and shoes with newspaper to retain shape. Leather should be left to dry away from heat and sun.
> Books must be taken care of as soon as possible. The best method to save wet books is to freeze them in a vacuum freezer. You may put them in a household freezer to stop pages sticking while you locate a vacuum freezer. Your local library or book restorer may be able to give special advice.
After experiencing the devastating effects of a fire first hand, you’ll want to prevent it happening ever again to your family and property.

Smoke alarms are required by law!

Working smoke alarms help save lives, the early warning they provide gives you the chance to use your Home Escape Plan.

Smoke alarms are inexpensive and can be bought from supermarkets, hardware stores, electrical retailers and most department stores.

To maximise the opportunity for early warning in all fire scenarios, the NSWFB recommends the installation of photoelectric smoke alarms, hard wired and interconnected, in all residential accommodation.

Consider installing interconnected smoke alarms in all bedrooms as well as between sleeping areas and the living area.

If only installing one alarm, it should be a photoelectric smoke alarm.
If the damage caused by a fire in your home will mean a full or partial rebuild it is worthwhile discussing the installation of residential sprinklers with your insurance company, architect or builder.

For more information contact your local fire station or go to www.fire.nsw.gov.au
If you would like to contact GIO about your insurance needs:

Phone 13 10 10
www.gio.com.au

You can obtain a copy of any of these brochures by calling us on 1800 151 614, visiting your local Fire Station or from our website www.fire.nsw.gov.au

This brochure has been produced as part of an initiative between NSW Fire Brigades and major community partner GIO.