

# **REBUILDING YOUR FUTURE**



## **A SELF HELP MANUAL FOR FIRE SURVIVORS**

American Red Cross Disaster Services



This book was developed by the American Red Cross to assist you in the recovery process following a fire. It includes step-by-step instructions to help you through the process of recovery and clean-up.

Your American Red Cross can be a valuable resource to help you in meeting the emergency needs created by this disaster. If you need help, Please **CALL US!!** We have trained volunteers and staff who can assist you with your needs and help guide you toward recovery.

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## **Louisiana Capital Area Chapter**

### **American Red Cross**

(225)291-4533 or 1-800-256-4733

24 Hours a Day, 7 Days a Week

*If you feel depressed or confused, call the **Crisis Line** at 924-3900.  
If you suffered the loss of a loved one, call the **Grief Recovery Center** at 924-6621.*

## I. The First 24 Hours



The disaster is over, but the road to recovery is just beginning. There are several important steps that you need to follow. Remember, the American Red Cross is here to Help.

### A. SECURING THE SITE

The site of the fire needs to be protected from further damage by weather, theft or vandalism.

#### The Owner:

- It is your responsibility to see that holes in the structure are covered, guarding against rain and unauthorized entry. Lock or secure outside doors. The fire department may assist you with this task.
- Contact your insurance agent. The agent must be notified of the fire in order to help you. Your agent may have suggestions on making any immediate repairs. If you can't reach your insurance agent or if you need professional assistance in boarding up your home, a general contractor or fire damage restoration firm can help. Be sure to secure the premises prior to leaving.

#### The Tenant:

- Contact your landlord as soon as possible. It is the owner's responsibility to prevent further loss to the site. Secure your personal belongings either in the damaged building or at another location, such as the home of a relative or friend.
- If you have renter's insurance, the agent must be notified of the fire in order to help you.  
*Note: Most landlord's insurance does not cover your belongings.*

### D. CAUTIONS AND REMINDERS



#### Cautions

- **FIRE** – Fire can rekindle from hidden, smoldering remains. Watch for signs of heat or smoke.
- **ELECTRICITY** – Household wiring, which may have been water damaged, should be checked by an electrician before electricity is switched back on.
- **STRUCTURE DAMAGE** – Watch for structural damage caused by fire. Roofs and floors may be weakened.
- **DAMAGED GOODS** – Discard food, beverages and medication exposed to heat, smoke or soot.
- **REFRIGERATED ITEMS** – Refrigerators or freezers left unopened will hold their temperature for a short time. However, do not attempt to refreeze thawed items.

## Reminders

- **UTILITIES** – The fire department will check the utilities (water, electricity, gas) for safety. They will disconnect any component that is unsafe. If any utility is disconnected, contact the utility company or authorized service representative to ensure it is in proper working order, make necessary repairs and reinstate service. **Do not attempt to reconnect utilities yourself.**
- **RECEIPTS** – Save receipts from disaster-related expenses. Insurance companies may require such proof for their records. Receipts are also essential for verifying losses claimed on your Federal Income Tax.
- **SAFE** – **Do not attempt to open your safe.** A safe involved in a fire can hold the intense heat for up to several hours. If the door is opened before the safe has cooled down, the entering air, combined with the hot inside temperature, can cause the contents to burst into flames.



## D. LEAVING YOUR HOME

Leaving your home temporarily may be necessary for safety reasons. You or the building inspector can make the judgment about the safety of the residence.

### Temporary Housing:

- **OWNER** – If you own your home and have insurance, check with your agent about temporary housing. If you need immediate funds, ask your agent how soon you can get an advance on your eventual insurance claim settlement.
- **RENTER** – If you rent, check with your landlord to see if he/she can relocate you temporarily.
- **RELATIVES** – Check with relatives and friends for temporary housing. They can provide essential emotional support as well.
- **AMERICAN RED CROSS** – Local relief services, like the American Red Cross, may help you with temporary housing if you have no other place to stay.

### ITEMS TO LOCATE BEFORE YOU LEAVE

Identification  
Vital Medications  
Valuables  
Eyeglasses, hearing aids, prosthetic devices

## **D. NOTIFY THE FOLLOWING OF YOUR LOCATION**

- Insurance Agent or Adjuster
- Mortgage Company (inform them of the fire)
- Employer
- Children's schools
- Delivery services for newspapers, etc.
- Post Office
- Utility companies

## **II. DOCUMENTS**

### **A. REPLACING DOCUMENTS**

If the following documents are destroyed, you will need to replace them:



- Birth certificate
- Driver's license
- Bank books
- Insurance policies
- Military discharge papers
- Passports
- Marriage certificates
- Credit cards
- Stocks and bonds
- Medical records
- Pre-paid burial contracts
- Income tax records
- Auto registrations
- Auto title
- Citizenship papers
- Pet registrations
- Social Security card
- Divorce papers
- Titles and deeds
- Wills
- Warrantees
- Account books

See the agency listing in the blue pages of your phone book for addresses to help replace the above items

### **B. DOCUMENTATION OF THE FIRE**

You can get a copy of the official fire report by contacting your local fire department. This report will provide verification that a fire occurred in your home. Some fire departments charge a nominal fee for the report.

### III. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

#### A. CHILDREN IN DISASTER

Disasters may strike quickly and without warning. These events can be frightening for adults, and even more traumatic for children if they don't know what to do.



#### Children are most afraid that:

- The event will happen again
- They will be separated from their family
- Someone will be injured or killed
- They will be left alone

#### Make sure to:

- Calmly and firmly explain the situation
- Encourage children to talk
- Include children in recovery activities

For more information, see the American Red Cross brochure *Helping Children Cope with Disaster* ARC 4499.

#### B. PETS IN DISASTER

The best way to protect your family from the effects of a disaster is to have a disaster plan. If you are a pet owner, that plan must include your pets. By being prepared, you can save their lives.



1. Have a safe place to take your pets
2. Assemble a portable pet disaster kit including:
  - Medication
  - Leashes and/or carriers to transport pets safely
  - Food, potable water, bowls, cat litter/pan and can opener
  - Pet beds and toys

## IV. THE CLEANUP PROCESS:

The following tips were compiled by members of the National Institute of Fire Restoration.

### A. FIRE AND SMOKE DAMAGE

After the fire damage, it is natural to want to clean a building and its contents. Time is of the essence and incorrect or delayed action can jeopardize or seriously impede satisfactory restoration.



#### DO...

- Clean and protect chrome trim on kitchen appliances with a light coating of petroleum jelly
- Clean and protect smoke-damaged bathroom faucets, tub fittings and towel bars with a light coating of oil
- Blow off or brush-vacuum loose smoke particles from upholstery, drapery and carpet
- Open windows for ventilation
- Change furnace filter if blower is operating
- If electricity is off, empty freezer and refrigerator completely, prop doors open with a rolled towel or newspaper
- Pour antifreeze in toilet bowls, sinks and tubs to prevent freezing if heat is off in winter
- If heat is off in winter, call plumber to drain steam heating systems
- Wash plants with water on both sides of leaves (water softener helps)
- Remove pets to clean environments

#### DO NOT...

- Use upholstered furniture if it can be avoided
- Use exposed food items or canned goods which have been subjected to excessive heat
- Use TV, stereos or electrical appliances until cleaned and checked by an authorized repair person

## B. WATER DAMAGE

**Some of your furniture or household items may suffer water damage as a result of extinguishing the flames from the fire. Further water damage can be avoided by following these simple steps:**

### **DO...**

- Remove as much excess water as possible by mopping and blotting
- Wipe water from wood furniture after removal of lamps and tabletop items
- Remove and prop up wet upholstery cushions for even drying
- Place aluminum foil, saucers or wood blocks between furniture legs and wet carpeting
- Open drawers and cabinet doors for complete drying
- Blot wet carpeting with clean white towels
- Open suitcases and luggage to dry; place in sunlight if possible
- Punch small holes in sagging ceilings to relieve trapped water (don't forget to place pans beneath the water flow)
- Keep out of rooms where ceilings are sagging from retained water

### **DO NOT...**

- Leave wet fabrics in place; dry immediately. Hang furs and leather goods to dry separately at room temperature.
- Leave books, magazines or other colored items on wet carpets or floors
- Use your household vacuum to remove water
- Use TVs or other appliances while standing on wet carpet or floors
- Turn on ceiling fixtures if ceiling is wet

## C. DO IT YOURSELF IDEAS

### **1. Floors**

Wood – If a wood floor is under water for any length of time, it will expand. If your floor is buckling, take up the trim board and remove one board along each edge of the floor. When the wood dries, it should shrink back to normal size.

Linoleum – Water underneath linoleum can cause bad odors and warped wood. If this happens, remove the linoleum. If the linoleum is brittle, a heat lamp will soften it so you can roll it without breaking it. If carefully removed, the linoleum can be re-cemented after the floor has dried. A new sheet of felt liner will be needed. Small blisters in linoleum can be punctured with a nail and re-cemented. Wait until the floor is completely dry before beginning. Dilute regular linoleum paste thin enough to go through the nail hole. Weight down the linoleum with bricks and boards until paste completely dries.

Rugs – Dry rugs as quickly as possible. If not thoroughly dry, remaining moisture at the base of the tufts will quickly rot the rug, causing it to fall apart. Lay rugs flat and expose them to warm, dry air. A fan will speed the drying. Let rugs dry thoroughly. Clean them by beating, sweeping or vacuuming. Shampoo with a commercial rug shampoo or two tablespoons dish detergent with one cup water. Shampoo with a soft brush using a circular motion.

## 2. **Walls and wallpaper**

Walls can be washed while still wet. Use a mild soap detergent and wash a small area at one time, working from the floor up. Rinse immediately with clear water. Ceilings should be washed last and painted only after everything is thoroughly dry. If there is substantial damage, then a primer is necessary. Vinyl primers work best. Consult your local paint store on how to repair plaster and stucco walls. Re-paste loosened edges of wallpaper with commercially prepared paste. Use a purchased putty-like cleaner and wash wallpaper the same as walls. Work quickly to prevent paper from becoming soaked, and work from bottom to top to prevent streaking.

## 3. **Furniture**

If your insurance covers fire or water-damaged furniture, it may be better to apply the allowance on new articles. If you plan to repair, consider the cost of glue, clamps and finish.

Wood – To repair water soaked wood furniture, take it outside and remove drawers from the front. Clean off soot and dirt using a hose if necessary. Wash with mild suds or smoke odor formula. Wipe dry and bring furniture inside. The sun will warp and twist the furniture.

To remove white spots or cloudiness that may develop, rub the surface with a cloth dampened with a solution of ½ cup of household ammonia and ½ cup of water. Wipe dry and polish with wax. Rub surface with equal parts of turpentine and linseed oil or with 4-0 steel wool pad dipped in liquid polishing wax. Wipe with a soft cloth, then buff. For small areas of white spots, use camphorated oil, or oil of peppermint, then buff.

Upholstered – Dry furniture immediately to prevent mildew and rotting. Brush off dirt and, if necessary, shampoo with a solution of ¼ cup powdered detergent mixed with ½ pint of hot water. Apply suds only with a sponge or damp cloth, and blot dry. Brush pile fabrics in one direction only. When completely dry, brush or vacuum residue.

Leather – To remove surface dirt, wash with cold water and wipe dry. Dry at room temperature away from heat and sun. When dry, clean with saddle soap, paste-type, neutral floor wax or other commercial finish wax.

## **5. Locks and Hinges**

Take apart and wipe with kerosene and oil. If they cannot be removed, squirt with machine oil through bolt or keyhole and turn knob to distribute oil.

## **6. Salvaging Food**

Canned – Wash cans and glass jars with household detergent and rinse in clear water. Do not use any canned goods with bulges, dents or rust spots

Frozen – Fruits can be re-frozen if they still taste and smell good.

Completely thawed vegetables cannot be re-frozen. Re-freeze only if there are some ice crystals in the vegetables. If they are thawed, discard them. If you question the vegetable's quality, throw them out. Spoilage begins before bad odor occurs.

Meat, poultry and fish can be refrozen if ice crystals remain. They need to be cooked thoroughly before eaten. If odor is bad, or you question their quality, then throw them out.

## **7. Appliances**

Do not operate washers, refrigerators, etc. until they have been checked by a serviceman. Turning on water-soaked appliances before they have been properly cleaned can cause further damage.

Take the back off an electric range and use a fan to dry out the inside. For a gas range, you need to call your local utility company.

Freezer-Refrigerator – If your freezer stops running, keep it closed. Usually the food will stay frozen for a day, possibly two or three days. When moving food to another freezer, wrap in plenty of newspapers and blankets. To remove odor from a refrigerator or freezer, wash with a solution of baking soda and water or vinegar, or household ammonia and water.

## **8. Mattresses, blankets and pillows**

Mattresses – A good innerspring mattress can probably be renovated by a company that builds and repairs mattresses. Reconditioning a mattress is too difficult to do at home. Temporarily set in sunlight to dry and cover with rubber or plastic sheeting.

Blankets and pillows – Shake and brush surface dirt from blankets. If possible, use manufacturer's cleaning instructions. Otherwise, soak for 15 minutes in lukewarm water and detergent suds. Turn two or three times by hand. Spin off water and repeat if necessary. Rinse two or three times in lukewarm, clear water and let dry in a pre-

heated dryer with some hot bath towels, or hang outside to dry. When dry, gently stretch the blanket back into shape and brush it. Finish by ironing trim.

It is almost impossible to get smoke odor out of pillows. Both feathers and foam pillows retain smoke odor.

## **9. Smoke, Odor and Soot**

Clothing – To wash smoke odor and soot out of all washable clothing (exception: those which should not be bleached), use one of the following:

(These chemicals can be purchased at hardware stores and some paint stores. Use rubber gloves)

### **To Remove Smoke Smell from Clothing**

¼ cup Pine Sol

1 cup Rock Salt

Use normal Detergent

Wash in cold water

May need to repeat 3 times

**Mix well, add clothes, rinse with clear water. Dry completely.**

-OR-

2 tablespoons Sodium Hypochlorite

1 gallon of water

Use in combination with Clorox, Purex or Lysol

## **10. Preparing Clothing for Cleaners**

Remove all trimmings, shoulder pads, etc. If the garment is wet, dry it completely in a well ventilated area. Shake and brush well. Take to cleaners immediately.

## **11. To Remove Mildew**

Clothing – Wash the fresh stain with soap and water. Rinse well and dry in the sun. If stain remains, use lemon juice and salt or a solution of household bleach.

Furniture, Floors and Walls – Mix together same ingredients as listed for clothing (above). Wash and rinse with clear water. Dry completely.

## **D. PREVENTION TIPS**

The National Fire Protection Association suggests the following tips for preventing fires in your home:

- Install and maintain smoke detectors
- Plan and practice an escape plan
- Carefully discard cigarettes
- Be careful while cooking
- Keep portable space heaters at least three feet from items that can burn
- Keep matches and lighters out of children's reach
- Use electricity safely

For more information on protecting your home and family from fire or other disasters, contact your American Red Cross. The Red Cross can provide you with helpful prevention literature and also offer a variety of free educational programs that can help you protect yourself.

**The Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP)  
examines and reimburses businesses and individuals  
for their damaged or mutilated money.**

If the currency is only wet, and not torn or ripped apart, the currency notes should be separated as soon as possible, and placed between paper towels. When they are dry, the notes should be taken to a local commercial bank where new currency notes for the same amount will be exchanged.

If, however, the currency is more seriously damaged or mutilated, it must be sent to the BEP's Office of Currency Standards for examination and identification after which the Office of Currency Standards will reimburse the claimant for its face value by a U. S. Treasury check. Specifically, mutilated currency can be exchanged at face value if:

- More than 50% of a currency note is present and identifiable or
- 50% or less of a currency note is present and the submitted evidence justifies the method of mutilation and the U. S. Treasury is satisfied that all missing portions of the currency note have been totally destroyed.

A letter should accompany the submitted currency and give the estimated value of the currency and explain how the currency was mutilated. All mutilated currency should be sent by "Registered Mail, Return Receipt Requested" to: Department of the Treasury, Bureau of Engraving and Printing, Office of Currency Standards, P. O. Box 37048, Washington, DC 20013. Insuring the shipment is the responsibility of the sender.

The Bureau's special currency examiners are usually able to determine the value of mutilated currency when it has been carefully packed and boxed as described below:

- Regardless of the condition of the currency, DO NOT disturb the fragments anymore than is absolutely necessary
- If the currency is brittle or inclined to fall apart, pack it carefully in plastic without disturbing the fragments, and place the package in a secure container.
- If the currency was mutilated in a purse, box, or other container, it should be left in the container to protect the fragments from further damage.
- If it is absolutely necessary to remove the fragments from the container, send the container along with the currency and any other contents that may have currency fragments attached.
- If the currency was flat when mutilated, do not roll or fold the notes.
- If the currency was in a roll when mutilated, do not attempt to unroll or straighten it out.
- If coin or other metal is mixed with currency, carefully remove it. Any fused, melted or otherwise mutilated coins should be sent for evaluation to the Superintendent, U. S. Mint, P. O. Box 400, Philadelphia, PA 19105.

The amount of time needed to process each case varies with its complexity and the case workload of the examiner. For cases that are expected to take longer than four weeks to process, BEP will issue a written confirmation of receipt.