

fire safety advice
After the Fire



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After the Fire

This booklet contains information to help you manage the immediate effects of fire or flooding in your home. The Fire and Rescue Service will have responded swiftly to your emergency but when we leave, you will have to deal with the aftermath yourself.

This information is offered as a guide only but we hope it will help you deal with your immediate concerns and guide you to other agencies that can provide help and advice.

1. Safety

Firefighters will have to remove smoke and hot gases from the building to lessen the damage caused by fire. They may have to break windows and open walls and ceilings to make sure that any hidden fires are dealt with, eliminating the danger of re-ignition.

Do you feel unwell?

If you feel unwell at any time after a fire or flood, contact NHS Direct (0845 46 47), your GP or the hospital's A&E department.

Is the building safe to enter?

The Fire and Rescue Service will have examined the structure that has been affected by fire and will advise you of any apparent defects that may compromise safety. Do not re-enter the building until you have been informed by the Fire and Rescue Service that it is safe to do so. In cases of severe structural damage, a Local Authority Building Inspector may be required to advise on the safety of the building.

Gas, electricity and water supplies may have been affected and turned off or disconnected. Never attempt to reconnect or turn on utilities yourself unless you are qualified to do so. Contact your utility supply companies to arrange reconnection.

Poor air quality

Fires can produce unhealthy chemicals, which can be absorbed by various surfaces during the fire and then slowly released as unpleasant gases afterwards. Fires also produce tiny particles of carbon that can float in the air for hours or even days. It is advisable to limit your exposure to this poor air quality, especially immediately after the fire. Opening doors and windows can sometimes help improve air quality

Sufferers from allergies, breathing difficulties or asthma should keep away from the property until air quality has improved. If in doubt, seek medical advice.

Use this space for notes:

6. British Red Cross - Fire and Emergency Support Service (FESS)

The FESS is provided by trained British Red Cross volunteers who work in partnership with Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS). The volunteers attend the scene of a fire or other incident in response to a request from RBFRS. The FESS is free of charge, as all costs are met by voluntary donations to the British Red Cross.

Type of support available:

- Immediate temporary shelter in the FESS vehicle.
- Emotional support.
- First aid.
- Help in seeking temporary accommodation.
- Assistance in contacting insurers.
- Support with the care of children and pets.
- Use of shower and toilet facilities.
- Provision of toiletries, clothing and light refreshments.
- Use of a telephone.
- Use of a camera to assist with insurance claims.

For more information or to make a donation, contact:

British Red Cross
Berkshire Branch HQ
90 Eastern Avenue
Reading
Berkshire
RG1 5SF

Phone: 0118 929 0500 (Berkshire Branch HQ reception)
Phone: 07659 136 008 (24-hour emergency number)

Website: www.redcross.org.uk  BritishRedCross

Fire residues

Avoid skin contact with fire residues as they can contain harmful chemicals that may damage the skin or be absorbed through it. If you have to handle contaminated items, reduce the risk by wearing gloves and suitable protective clothing.

Smoke alarms

If one or more of your smoke alarms activated, you will need to replace their batteries. If a unit has been subjected to high temperatures and/or damage by smoke, you will need to replace it as soon as possible. This applies to all types of smoke alarm.

Flood water

Avoid direct contact with any contaminated water e.g. sewage and storm water. Wash your hands thoroughly before touching food and protect any cuts with a waterproof plaster. People with weaker immune systems (e.g. babies and the elderly) should be especially careful.

In cases of severe flooding the structural stability of buildings or garden walls could have been affected. If in doubt, seek advice from your Local Authority Environmental Health or Building Control Officer, or ask your landlord to arrange a safety inspection.

Damaged and wet electrical wiring or appliances must be isolated and checked by a competent person before use - don't risk electrocution. Remember that water conducts electricity and that TV sets store an electrical charge for several hours.

2. Security

Firefighters will have attempted to save valuables from the fire and returned them to their owner or the police. However, when we leave the incident responsibility for the property passes to the householder or police:

- If you have to leave the property unattended, make sure that all the windows and doors are closed and locked. If this is not possible, contact a boarding-up contractor through your local telephone or trade directory (under Fire and Flood or Glaziers).
- Remove valuables and important documents if it is safe to do so.
- If you live in rented accommodation, advise your landlord of the emergency as soon as possible.
- Firefighters may use large salvage sheets to protect your home from the elements, which will need to be returned as soon as possible. As soon as you can make alternative arrangements, please contact us for their removal.

3. Insurance

Contact your insurance company or broker, remembering that both contents and buildings insurers may need to be informed. They will provide you with a claim form. They may need to inspect the property or contents before you can start clearing up. It may be useful to make a detailed list and take photographs of anything that has been damaged. Keep copies of all correspondence.

If you do not have insurance, other agencies may be able to help with the following:

- Accommodation - your Local Authority.
- Furniture/bedding/personal items - www.directgov.uk or voluntary services.
- Financial problems.
- Legal advice - Citizens Advice Bureau or victim support groups.
- General Advice - Citizens Advice Bureau, Fire and Rescue Service, Police.

4. Personal documents

If your personal documents have been lost or destroyed, these contacts may be useful:

- Insurance policies
Contact your insurance provider.
- Personal finance and credit cards
Contact your financial providers i.e. banks and building societies etc.
- Birth/Death/Marriage certificates
Contact the General Register Office, PO Box 2, Southport, Merseyside R8 2JD, tel: 0870 243 7788, web: www.statistics.gov.uk.

Alternatively, contact the local office whose details will be in the telephone directory.

- Driving licence/vehicle records
Contact DVLA, Swansea, SA00 1AB.

- Medical records
Contact your GP, health centre or hospital.
- Income tax
The local tax office holds details of personal tax records.
- Divorce decree
Contact the original Court Office where the decree was made. Your solicitor may be able to help.
- Wills
Contact your solicitor or the Citizens Advice Bureau.
- Stocks/bond/title deeds
Contact your solicitor or broker as they may have your details. The Post Office will be able to give you details of how to obtain duplicates of Post Office bonds.
- Social Security documents
Contact your local Social Security department. Details will be in the telephone directory.
- Passports/visas
The UKPS passport advice line is available on 0870 5210 4107.

5. Living safely

Follow these simple tips to prevent fires starting in the home:

- Switch off electrical appliances when not in use.
- Don't overload sockets - it is better to use a bar adaptor on a lead rather than a block adaptor.
- Use fireguards around open fires, especially where children are present.
- Make sure smokers' materials are properly extinguished and disposed of, making sure the contents of the ashtray cannot spill onto furnishings.
- Keep matches and lighters out of the sight and reach of children.