

After a Fire



What to do in the hours and days after a fire strikes...



Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How did this fire start?

Depending on the type and size of fire that has occurred, the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) "Officer in Charge" may be able to determine the cause. If they are unable to, they will ensure that the QFES Fire Investigation Unit (FIU) will attend the incident to investigate.

Q: When can I go back into my home?

Before allowing you back into your home, QFES will conduct atmospheric monitoring to ensure that the interior environment is safe to enter without respiratory protection. If QFES FIU and/or Queensland Police Service (QPS) are conducting investigations to determine the cause, there may be a delay before entry is allowed.

Q: Can I remove any items from my residence?

Before any items can be removed from the property, investigations by QFES and/or QPS will need to be completed. Approval may be given by QFES and/or QPS to remove items from the non-fire affected area.

Q: Can I live in my home?

If the fire has been of a substantial size, the structural integrity of the building may need to be determined by a qualified person before anyone can live in the building. If the fire was of a smaller size, atmospheric monitoring and cause investigations will need to be completed before you can live in the building.

Q: Why have windows been broken and/or holes cut in roof?

The breaking of windows and cutting of holes in the roof (ventilation) is an action taken by QFES to aid firefighting by removing blinding hot smoke from the structure. Studies have proven that the results of taking this action cause less damage to the structure in the long run.

Q: Why have ceilings been removed and/or holes cut in walls?

In most cases, this action has been taken by QFES to ensure that the fire has been completely extinguished.



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After the fire What to do in the hours and days after fire strikes

If you have been given this booklet by a firefighter, it is most likely that your home has been damaged or destroyed by fire. The advice included in this booklet will help you through this difficult time.

While what has happened to you may be difficult to understand and accept, there are things you can do right now to begin rebuilding your life. There are organisations and people who can help you do this.

Your starting point is securing and protecting what remains of your property.

Lifeline provides a confidential crisis counselling service and referrals 24-hours a day, 7 days a week.

Telephone: 13 11 14

For emergency pet care, contact the **RSPCA** on 07 3426 9999.

This is a 24 hour state-wide service.

Fight Fire Fascination is a free program available to help children and young people (aged between three and 17) develop fire safe skills. Visit www.qfes.qld.gov.au/fff for more information.

STEP 1

Security of Your Property

After emergency services personnel have finished their work, the property will be handed back to you. The fire site may need to be protected from further damage by weather, theft, or vandalism.

The owner of a building or structure is responsible for making sure that external openings are secure and unapproved access to the site is restricted. This can be done by using plywood sheeting to board up entry points, or by installing temporary fencing to keep people off the property altogether.

In rented properties, the occupier is responsible for informing the estate agent or landlord of the fire, who is responsible for securing the site.

Assistance with site security can be obtained from:

- a general building contractor
- a fire damage restoration company
- some insurance companies.

Check your local phone directory or the internet to locate businesses that can help you in these areas.

Temporary housing may be accessed through local family welfare organisations. However, staying with family or friends can be the simplest option.



Safety

STEP 2

Fires may restart from hidden, smouldering remains. Do not re-enter a fire damaged site unless it is necessary.

Utilities to the site such as water, electricity, and gas supply may have been shut off or disconnected by QFES or other agencies.

Electricity and Gas Supply

If you are unsure of whether something is safe, ask a relevant qualified tradesperson for advice. Wiring and appliances (gas or electric) must be inspected by a qualified tradesperson before the appliance is reconnected, or utilities restored to the site.

Building Safety

Buildings affected by fire can easily become unsafe. Walls, roofs, and ceilings can give way without warning, and floors and stairs may not be as sound as they appear. A building inspector will be needed to ensure structural safety before you re-enter the building. The inspector is best qualified to assess weaknesses in walls, ceilings and floors. Be aware of hazardous waste such as asbestos (generally found in bathrooms and laundries of older homes) which will require special handling and disposal.

Food

Discard any foodstuffs, beverages, or medicines exposed to heat or water damage. Do not re-freeze frozen food that may have thawed during the incident.

STEP 3

Insurance

If you are insured, your insurance will be the most important single component in recovering from a fire loss.

Your insurance policy is a contract between you and the insurance company. The insurer promises to do certain things for you. In turn, you too have some obligations. After a fire loss, one of your first duties is to notify your insurance company or insurance broker immediately.

It is also important that you protect the property from further damage by making sensible precautions such as covering holes in the roof or walls. You need to take reasonable precautions against further loss as the insurance company may refuse to pay losses that occur after the fire incident.

Make a list of damaged personal property, detailing the quantity, description, original purchase price, purchase date, damage estimate and replacement cost. Take photos as proof. Do not discard any item without first consulting your insurance company.

It is important to contact your insurance adjuster before contracting for any services. If you engage any cleaning or repair contractors without the insurance company's knowledge or consent, you may be left with bills to pay that otherwise would have been covered by insurance. The sooner your insurer or their broker is notified, the sooner rectification work can begin. Keep any receipts for money you do spend in relation to the fire loss.

If you cannot remember the name of your insurance company, or if their details are not at hand, contact the nearest office of the Insurance Council of Australia.

Leaving Your Home

STEP 4

It may be necessary to leave your home because of structural damage or because it is now an unsafe environment.

Contact local police to inform them of your intentions to leave, and provide them with a contact address or phone number.

Contact gas, electricity, water, phone and internet providers to cancel your services.

If relatives and friends are unable to help with accommodation, or provide the level of support you need, there are community-based organisations that may be able to provide assistance.

If you are in need of urgent accommodation, check the 'Community Service Organisations' section in the Yellow Pages of the telephone directory or visit the website at www.yellowpages.com.au.

Your insurance policy may include emergency accommodation. Check with your insurance provider.

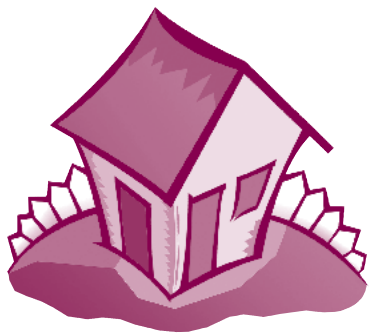
Rebuilding Your Home

STEP 5

Should you need to rebuild your home, you will need to:

- consult with your insurance company
- check with your local council
- engage a licensed, registered builder.





Things to do

If you need to enter the building, check first with the fire officer-in-charge at the site and police if they are present. Make sure that the area is safe to enter and follow all instructions. A structural engineer may be needed to give advice.

There will be many things that you want to retrieve, however some items that are particularly important include:

- ☐ Identification (e.g. wallets, passports)
- ☐ Credit cards, cheque books
- ☐ Legal documents
- ☐ Insurance papers
- ☐ Medications that have not been affected
- ☐ Spectacles, hearing aids, prosthetic devices, personal aids
- ☐ Valuables and personal items (e.g. jewellery, photo albums, cash, laptops, mobile phones, computer hard drives)

Your Checklists

Consider notifying these people to let them know of your relocation and contact details:

- ☐ Your employer
Details: _____
- ☐ Your children's schools
Details: _____
- ☐ Post office (to hold or forward your mail)
Details: _____
- ☐ Delivered services (e.g. newspaper, milk, groceries)
Details: _____
- ☐ Your local council
Details: _____
- ☐ The police (if the fire is under investigation)
Details: _____
- ☐ Insurance company
Details: _____

STEP 6

Salvage Hints

If your home has not been completely destroyed, you may be able to salvage some items that are affected by the fire but intact. Here are some hints for their restoration. Start by opening windows to get the air moving and ventilate areas. You can use a fan to circulate air.

NOTE: Salvaging property should be undertaken only after consultation with your insurance company.

» Clothing

Smoke odour can sometimes be washed from clothing. Treat clothing as soon as possible, before it dries and the odours set in. Soaking the clothing in warm water is the best way to get the smoke smell out.

Soak clothing in a mixture of washing detergent or white vinegar (or a mixture of the two) and water. Soak overnight and rinse the clothing out. If the odour remains, repeat this process. Once the smell has lifted, run the clothing through a normal wash cycle.

» Cooking utensils, pots, and pans

Check all dishes, pots, pans, cutlery and kitchen equipment that might have been damaged or contaminated and dispose of any damaged items. Wash with hot soapy water, and rinse thoroughly. You can polish them afterwards if necessary.



» Power and electrical appliances

If the fire service turned off your gas or power during the fire, call your electricity or gas company to restore these services – **DO NOT TRY TO DO IT YOURSELF.**

Don't use equipment, particularly electrical appliances, that have been exposed to water until you have an authorised service technician check them.

» Non-perishable food

Wash cans and jars in detergent and water, marking the contents on the can or jar with a permanent marker if labels come off. Do not use canned goods that have bulged, or are dented or rusted.

» Fridge and freezer food

If your home freezer has stopped running, you can still save the frozen food. Keep the freezer closed, as it has enough insulation to keep food frozen for at least one day. You can, move your food to a neighbour's freezer, wrap the frozen food in newspapers and blankets, or use an esky. Do not re-freeze food that has thawed.

To remove odour from your refrigerator or freezer, wash the inside with a solution of bicarbonate soda and water, or use one cup of vinegar to 4 litres of water. Absorb odour by placing a piece of charcoal or bicarbonate soda in an open container in the refrigerator or freezer.

» Locks and hinges

Locks (especially iron locks) should be taken apart, wiped with kerosene and oiled. If locks cannot be removed, squirt machine oil through a bolt opening or keyhole and work the knob to distribute the oil. Hinges should be thoroughly cleaned and oiled.

Salvage Hints

» Flooring and rugs

When water gets underneath linoleum, it can cause odours and warp the floorboards. If this happens, remove the entire sheet. If the linoleum is brittle, a heat lamp will soften it so it can be rolled up without breaking. If carefully removed, it can be re-cemented after the floor has completely dried.

Small blisters in linoleum can be punctured with a nail and re-cemented if you are careful. Dilute regular linoleum paste thin enough to go through a hand syringe and insert the adhesive through the nail hole. Weigh down the linoleum with bricks or boards. It is usually possible to cement loose tiles of any type. Wait until the floor is completely dry before beginning work.

Allow rugs and carpets to dry thoroughly. You can clean throw rugs by beating, sweeping or vacuuming, and then shampooing. Dry them as quickly as possible. Lay them flat, and expose them to a circulation of warm, dry air. Using a fan on the rugs will speed drying. Make sure they are thoroughly dry. Even though surfaces seem dry, moisture remaining at the base of the tufts can quickly rot a rug.

For information on cleaning and preserving carpets, call your carpet dealer or installer, or carpet cleaning professional.

» Walls

To remove soot and smoke from walls and floors, wear rubber gloves, a dust mask, long sleeved shirt and pants. You can use hot soapy water or a mixture of sugar soap and water.

Walls can be washed down while wet. Wash a small area at a time, working from the ceiling down, immediately rinsing

the area with a clean wet cloth until the water is clear. Do not repaint until the walls and ceilings are completely dry.

Wallpaper can also be repaired. Use a commercial paste to re-paste loose edges or sections. Contact your wallpaper dealer or installer for information on wallpaper cleaners. Washable wallpaper can be washed like an ordinary wall, but care must be taken not to soak the paper. Work from bottom to top to prevent streaking.

» Furniture

Do not dry your furniture in the sun as the wood can warp and twist out of shape. Clear off the dust, mud and dirt by scrubbing with a stiff brush warm soapy water. You can also rub the wood surface with a 4/0 steel wool pad dipped in liquid polishing wax, wiping with a soft cloth and then buffing.

Remove any drawers and let them dry thoroughly so there will be no sticking when you replace them.

Wet wood can decay and mould, so allow it to dry thoroughly.

Open doors and windows for good ventilation and if necessary, turn on your heating or air conditioner. If mould forms, wipe the wood with a cloth soaked in a mixture of vinegar and hot water.

To remove white spots or film, rub the wood surface with a cloth soaked in a solution of ½ cup of vinegar and ½ cup of water. Wipe dry and polish with wax, or rub the surface with a cloth soaked in linseed oil.



Salvage Hints

» Mattresses and pillows

Reconditioning an innerspring mattress at home is very difficult, if not impossible. Your mattress may be able to be renovated by a company that builds or repairs mattresses. If you must use your mattress temporarily, put it out into the sun to dry, then cover it with rubber or plastic sheeting before adding linen. It is almost impossible to get a smoke smell out of foam and feather pillows.

» Leather

Wipe leather goods with a damp cloth, then a dry cloth. Fill purses and shoes with newspapers to retain shape. Leave suitcases open. Dry wet leather goods away from heat and sun. When dry, clean with saddle soap. You can use steel wool or a suede brush on suede. Rinse leather and suede jackets in cold water and dry away from heat and sun.

» Books

You may not be able to salvage all of your books, however it is possible to try drying them out. Immediately put books in the freezer to stop mould from growing until you have time to dry them.

If a book is very wet, keep it closed and balance the book on its edge so that the water can drain out. Put wax paper between any pages that are glossy to prevent sticking. When a book is partly wet, open it carefully and insert absorbent paper at approximately every 20 pages. As it starts to dry, stand the book on edge and open it a little in front of a fan. Once nearly dry, close the book and add a light weight on top until the book is dry.



Fire Service Reports



Administrative Access Scheme

The QFES Administrative Access Scheme allows members of the public to access certain information held by QFES without having to apply through a formal Information Privacy or Right to Information application process.

Examples of the types of information collected and held by QFES that may be released through the Administrative Access Scheme are:

- Operational reports relating to fire incidents
- Operational reports relating to motor vehicle incidents
- Fire Investigation Reports
- Scientific Reports

How to make a request

Enquiries can be made in writing, via email, or over the telephone. However, an application form, supporting documentation and payment will be required.

For further information, telephone 13 QGOV (13 7468) or send correspondence to:

Queensland Fire and Emergency Services
Administrative Access Scheme
GPO Box 1425
BRISBANE QLD 4001

Email: QFESadminaccess@qfes.qld.gov.au



Contact Information

Use this page to list details relevant to the fire, contacts and phone numbers and the action you may wish to take.

Date and time of incident:

Police Officer's name:

Police Station:

Phone Number:

Date:

Fire and Rescue Service Officer's name:

Fire Station:

Phone Number:

Date:

Insurance Company:

Type of Policy:

Insurance Assessor's Name:

Other Information:

Your Notes

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Your Notes

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A large, stylized graphic on the right side of the page, resembling a sun or a fire. It consists of a solid dark red circle on the right, with two concentric dashed red lines curving around it from the top right towards the bottom right. The background is a gradient from yellow at the top to orange at the bottom.

**For more information contact your local fire
station or visit www.qfes.qld.gov.au.**