



Victoria Fire Department



Information for Recovering From a Fire

A fire will change your life in many ways that you cannot imagine. Knowing where to begin and who can help you is important. The Victoria Fire Department provides this booklet as part of our continued commitment to your safety. The information contained in these pages will assist you in your household's recovery and restoring property damage by fire.

Taner Drake Fire Chief

Checklist Activities “After the Fire”

Here are the steps to follow after a fire in your home:

- ✓ Contact your local disaster relief service, such as the American Red Cross. They will help you find a place to stay for awhile and find food, medicines, and other important things.
- ✓ If you have insurance, contact your insurance company. Ask what you should do to keep your home safe until it is repaired. Find out how they want you to make a list of things that were lost or damaged in the fire. Ask who you should talk to about cleaning up the mess. If you are not insured, try contacting community groups for aid and assistance.
- ✓ Check with the fire department to make sure your home is safe to enter. Be very careful when you go inside. Floors and walls may not be as safe as they look.
- ✓ The fire department will tell you if your utilities (water, electricity, and gas) are safe to use. If not, they will shut these off before they leave. **DO NOT** attempt to turn utilities back on by yourself as this could be very dangerous.
- ✓ Contact your landlord or mortgage company about the fire.
- ✓ Try to find valuable documents and records. See the information in this brochure about how to get new copies if you need them.
- ✓ If you leave your home, call the local police department to let them know the site will be vacant.
- ✓ Begin saving receipts for any money you spend related to fire loss. The receipts may be needed later by the insurance company and to prove any losses claimed on your income tax.
- ✓ Check with an accountant or the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) about special benefits for people recovering from fire loss.

What to expect

A fire in a home, whether you live in an apartment, a single family, or multifamily home, can cause serious damage. The building and many of the things in your home may have been badly damaged by flames, heat, smoke, and water. You will find that things the fire did not burn up are now ruined by smoke and soggy with water used to put out the flames. Anything you want to save or re-use will need to be carefully cleaned.

FAQ's about fire department actions

Q. Why did they break windows and cut holes in the roof?

As a fire burns, it moves up and down and across, growing very fast. Breaking windows and cutting holes in the roof is called ventilation. This slows the fire's growth. It helps get rid of dark smoke that makes it hard for firefighters to see where they are going. It helps them fight the fire more quickly. In the end, ventilation can help save lives and property.

Q. Why do firefighters cut holes in walls and ceilings?

This is done so that the fire department is sure that the fire is completely out and that there is no fire left inside the walls or in other hidden places.

Q. How can I get a copy of the fire report?

In most areas, a fire report is a public document. Contact the City of Victoria Fire Marshal's Office. The fire report will help you with information that your insurance company and other official offices may request.

Protect Yourself

Use Caution

We know you are anxious to inspect the damage and, if possible, begin to recover your belongings. Please be aware that there may be unseen hazards present.

Damage

The building may have suffered structural damage and be physically unsafe to enter. Gas, electrical or plumbing may not be working.

Toxins

Smoke and sooty deposits may be present. Toxins may include gases produced in the fire, as well as particles such as asbestos fibers used in some building materials. Exposure to some of these toxins has been shown to increase the risk of developing certain types of cancer.

Airborne Contaminants

Some individuals may be especially sensitive to contaminants or sooty deposits which may be present after a fire. These include babies, small children, older persons, pregnant women and individuals with respiratory disease. In most cases, it is safer and quicker to have your insurance agency handle the necessary clean up and renovation of your property. The agency can arrange repairs by skilled professionals who specialize in fire and water damage repairs. These individuals are aware of the possible hazards present and have the equipment to deal with them.

Protect Your Property

What You Need to Know

After the Fire Department personnel leave, the building becomes your responsibility. If possible, the firefighters will secure doors and windows. The final responsibility does however, lie with the owner.

It is the responsibility of the owner to secure the structure after the fire. This may be done with plywood or other materials, or a security fence may be installed around the structure. Your insurance company should be able to assist with this.

Remove Your Valuables

If it is safe to enter the building, remove all valuables. It is your responsibility to protect against further damage due to weather, theft or vandalism.

Contact Your Insurance Agent

Do this as soon as possible. He or she must be notified of the fire and will be able to help you arrange for immediate repairs. If you cannot reach your agent and or have no insurance, you may wish to obtain professional assistance for cleaning. Fire and water damage restoration firms are listed in the local resources section of this guide.

Contact Your Manager

If you are a tenant, contact the resident manager, the owner or the owner's insurance agent. It is the owner's responsibility to prevent further loss to the building.

If Your Home is Uninhabitable

Use caution in re-occupying your home. If it has been severely damaged or contaminated, you may need to find other housing. If you are covered by a homeowner's insurance policy, you may be eligible for temporary housing. Remember, save any receipts for money you spend related to your fire loss. Your insurance company will want copies in order to reimburse you. These receipts will also be useful for verifying losses claimed on your federal income tax. Individuals who have experienced a fire or other disaster may obtain assistance from the local American Red Cross. Upon application to the American Red Cross, you may be able to obtain food, clothing, lodging and other services. Day or night call 361-573-2671 and ask for Disaster Services. In addition to the Red Cross, there are

other community agencies which may be able to help. Your Red Cross disaster caseworker can assist you in contacting appropriate agencies.

Be sure to notify the following:

- ✓ The Post Office of your new address
- ✓ Bank(s)
- ✓ Credit card companies
- ✓ Public Utilities (water & garbage)
- ✓ Other utilities
- ✓ Social Security Administration, if necessary
- ✓ Your children's schools
- ✓ The Police Department if your home will be left vacant for any length of time

Construction

If the building is structurally damaged to the point that it is not habitable, a building inspector must be called. After the building inspection, a permit must be obtained prior to making repairs. Building Inspection: 361-485-3320

Utilities

The Fire Department may have the utility services shut off or disconnected as a safety precaution and also to prevent further damage to the structure and its contents. The procedures for re-establishing utility service are as follows:

Electricity

An electrical inspector must check wiring to be sure it is safe to reconnect power. Remember; do not operate wet or damp appliances. It is recommended to have a licensed electrician evaluate the electrical system.

Water

Water service inspection may be requested by calling 361-485-3400 during normal business hours.

Natural Gas

DO NOT turn the gas back on. Call the gas company or propane/butane supplier.

Telephone

Contact your telephone company's business office.

Care of Books & Documents

Documents

Below is a list of documents that should be located, if possible, to speed up the process of recovering from a disaster. NOTE: It is wise to store all important documents in a fireproof container or cabinet.

✓ Birth Certificate	✓ Driver's License
✓ Bank Books	✓ Insurance Policies
✓ Military Discharge Papers	✓ Passports
✓ Social Security Cards	✓ Marriage Papers
✓ Divorce Decree	✓ Credit Cards
✓ Title to Deeds	✓ Stocks & Bonds
✓ Senior Citizen ID Card	✓ Wills
✓ Medical Records	✓ Payment Books
✓ Warranties	✓ Income Tax Records
✓ Automobile Registration	✓ Citizenship Papers
✓ Burial Contracts	✓ Pet Licenses
✓ Death Certificates	✓ DSHS ID Card

Replacing money

Handle burned money as little as possible. Try to place each bill or part of a bill in plastic wrap to help preserve it. If money is partly burned—if half or more is still ok—you can take the part that is left to your regional Federal Reserve Bank to get it replaced. Ask your bank for the one nearest you or you can take the burned or torn money to the Post Office and mail it 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

Damaged or melted coins may be taken to your regional Federal Reserve Bank or mailed by “registered mail, return receipt requested” to:

Superintendent U.S. Mint
P.O. Box 400
Philadelphia, PA 19105

U.S. Savings Bonds

To replace U.S. Savings Bonds that are destroyed or mutilated, get the Department of Treasury Form PD F 1048 (I) from your bank or at www.ustreas.gov.

Call 1-800-333-2919 to request a Form DD 1048. Include name(s) and address (s) on bonds, approximate date of purchase, denomination and number of bonds.

Department of the Treasury Bureau of the Public Debt Savings Bonds Operations
P.O. Box 1328
Parkersburg, WV 26106-1328

Books

Place books on end, separate pages and air dry. You can also try placing unmarked dry paper between the pages and pressing to prevent crinkling and distorting. If very wet, air dry until damp, sprinkle cornstarch between pages, allow starch to consume moisture, then wipe with a dry cloth and press.

Documents

Sharp-freeze immediately. When desired copies are needed, simply allow to thaw, lift off each page as it thaws and copy. Contact any of the meat-cutting firms located in the yellow pages of your phone book for sharp (quick) freeze service.

Food, Medicines, Cosmetics

Medicines, cosmetics and most foods exposed to heat or smoke should be thrown away.

Canned Food

Throw away any home-canned products or cans with bulges or dents. Undamaged commercially canned food may be disinfected before opening by washing with detergent. Rinse in cool, clean water. Disinfect by immersing in a solution of two tablespoons of household bleach per one gallon of water. Use a black permanent marker to re-label each can.

Cleaning Tips

Mildew

Many people are allergic to molds and mildew. Public Health recommends that all mattresses, upholstered articles and carpet pads be thrown out if they have been soaked. They cannot be dried fast or well enough to keep mildew and mold spores from growing. If you do keep any of these items, follow the directions below:

Upholstered Items & Mattresses

Remove loose mold from surfaces by brushing with a broom. Do this outdoors to prevent scattering mildew spores in the house. Vacuum the surface to draw out more of the mold. Items should be thoroughly dried by using an electric heater or fan to carry away moist air. If mildew remains, sponge lightly with thick detergent suds using only the foam; wipe with a clean, damp cloth. If molds have grown into the inner part of an item, send to a reliable dry cleaner.

Clothing

Clothing that can withstand bleaching should be cleaned by washing in a mixture of 1/2 cup of ammonia to two gallons of water. Rinse in vinegar. (Use rubber gloves). Rinse with clear water and dry thoroughly.

Always read the CARE LABEL for proper instructions before cleaning any garments. Additional information may be obtained from a commercial cleaning service.

Dishes

Wash all china, glass, pots and pans in hot, soapy water, using a scrub brush to remove any debris. Rinse in clear, clean water and dip in a solution of two tablespoons of ordinary household bleach to one gallon of water. Dishes with deep cracks must be thrown away.

Plastic and Wood Items

Plastic cookware, utensils, dishware, baby bottles and nipples, containers, cups and wooden utensils and bowls cannot be disinfected after exposure to contaminated water or chemicals. Do not use them for food or edible products.

Leather

Wipe with a damp cloth, then with a dry cloth. Stuff your purses, shoes, etc., with paper to retain shape. Leave suitcases open for airing. Steel wool or a suede brush can be used on suede. Contact leather and suede cleaners for expert information. See yellow pages under "Leather".

Walls

Walls may be washed while still wet. Use a mild soap or detergent. Wash a small area at a time, working from the floor up. Rinse in clear water immediately. Ceilings should be washed last. Do not paint until thoroughly dry. Contact a paint dealer for further information.

Washable Wallpaper

Heat and ventilate room for several days to dry both plaster and paper.

Wipe mildewed paper with soap and a wrung-out cloth. Rinse with clear water.

Re-paste edges or loosened sections.

Work quickly so paper does not become soaked. Work from bottom to top to prevent streaking.

Linoleum/Vinyl Floors

If water is allowed to remain underneath linoleum, odors and breakdown of wood begins. To remove or lift flooring, it is recommended that you contact a flooring specialist.

Removing White Spots on Wood Furniture

Wipe dry at once and polish with wax or furniture polish.

Combating Odors

It is generally a very complex problem due to the varied materials on the market today which are manufactured by combining natural and man-made fibers. For best results, contact a professional cleaning service.

Wall to Wall Carpet

See "Mildew" section for warnings about soaked carpeting. If carpeting is soaked, experts recommend replacing the padding underneath. A wet/dry vacuum or water extractor carpet cleaner can be rented at most supermarkets. Use it to remove standing water and dirt from carpets that are damp, but not soaked. Then add carpet cleaning detergent and clean the carpet as instructed. Rinse with vinegar and water in the tank of the machine. For further information, contact a commercial cleaning service.

Rugs

Let rugs and carpets dry thoroughly. Clean with a commercial grade rug shampoo. Dry the rugs as quickly as possible by laying them flat and exposing them to warm, dry air. Make sure rugs are thoroughly dry.

Refrigerators and Freezers

Sometimes odors are difficult to remove due to damp insulation which absorbs odor. Here are some cleaning recommendations:

Defrost and wash all surfaces with water and dishwasher detergent, rinse with two tablespoons baking soda per quart of water, re-rinse with clear water.

Alternatively, wash with solution of one cup vinegar to one gallon water or with solution of one cup household ammonia to one gallon water.

Caution: When cleaning or removing any refrigerator or freezer, be sure doors are removed or secured against closing on children!

Reference Directory

Family Assistance Programs

American Red Cross	361-573-2671
Victoria Christian Assistance Ministry	361-572-0048
Salvation Army	361-576-1297
Goodwill	361-575-6242

Animal Services

Victoria County Animal Shelter	361-578-3564
Dorothy O'Conner Pet adoption Center	361-575-8573
Adopt-A –Pet	361-575-7387

City of Victoria

COV Building Inspection Department	361-485-3320
COV Fire Department Administration	361-485-3450
COV Fire Marshal's Office	361-485-3460
COV Public Works/Utility Billing	361-485-3400
COV Police Department Administration	361-485-3700
COV Operator	361-485-3500
Victoria Transit	361-578-8775

Restoration Services

Rainbow International	361-573-6000
Serv Pro	361-578-4476
X Press Restoration Services	361-573-7777 361-782-2222

Government Assistance

Internal Revenue Service (Ask for a copy of Publication 547)	800-829-1040
Social Security administration	361-575-8254
Texas DPS Drivers License	361-578-3450

Utilities

AEP American Electric Power	877-373-4858
VEC Victoria Electric Cooperative	361-573-2428
Center Point Energy	800-427-7142
STEC	361-575-6491 888-480-3534
Suddenlink Communications	361-573-6301

Victoria County Offices

Victoria County Sheriff's office	361-575-0561
Victoria County Fire Marshal's Office	361-579-9103
Victoria County Tax Appraisal District	361-576-3621
Victoria County Tax Office (Motor Vehicle Registration)	361-576-3671