ALISAL FIRE
RETURNING HOME

What should I do first?

Returning to a damaged or destroyed residence and neighboring area is a traumatic occurrence, and you may feel overwhelmed by the many tasks ahead. Remember that self-care is the vital first step for you to remain healthy and resilient. The emotional and physical health of you and your family should be your first concern.

If you have children, leave them with a relative or friend while you conduct your first inspection of your home after the disaster. The site may be unsafe for children, and seeing the damage firsthand before you have had a chance to prepare yourself emotionally may cause long-term effects, including nightmares.

Mental health services are available 24/7 through the Santa Barbara County Department of Behavioral Wellness, toll-free at (888) 868-1649.

For assistance with physical health questions, there are many excellent resources regarding smoke exposure available at www.ourair.org/about-smoke-and-health/. If you are feeling ill, consult with your physician.

Your Right To Privacy

The media has been actively involved with keeping the community informed during this incident and continues to pursue stories about the fire’s impacts. You may be approached by reporters or camera crews as you return to your neighborhood, but are under no obligation to consent to interviews, photographs or filming. Make and communicate your decisions based on your own needs and the needs of your family.

Returning Home and potential Concerns

- Check grounds for hot spots, smoldering stumps, and vegetation.
- Check the roof and exterior areas for sparks or embers.
- Trees and brush may be weakened or loosened by fire and may lose limbs or fall.
- Rocks loosened by fire may roll and crumble. If rocks have rolled down a slope expect more to follow.
• There may be debris or damage from fire on roads and driveways.
• Utility poles may be weakened by fire.

**Being careful as you return home:**

• Do not remove or walk past colored tape that was placed over doors or windows to mark damaged areas unless you have been told that it is safe to do so.
• Check the outside of your home before you enter. Look for loose power lines, broken or damaged gas lines, foundation cracks, missing support beams or other damage. Damage on the outside can indicate a serious problem inside.

**Things to look for as you return home:**

• Is your well or pump-house in working order?

**Going inside your home:**

• Take photos and/or video to document everything before you begin moving or removing debris, objects, furniture, structures, etc. You may need these to substantiate insurance claims later.
• If the door is jammed, don’t force it open – it may be providing support to the rest of your home. Find another way to get inside.
• Sniff for gas. If you detect natural or propane gas, or hear a hissing noise, leave the property immediately and move far away. Call the fire department after you reach safety.
• If electricity is off, make sure all appliances are turned off. Once you are sure all appliances are turned off, if there is no fire damage to your home and the meter does not have any visible damage, you may turn on the main circuit breaker.
• Check if hard wired phones are working and notify your service provider if not.
• Check if security systems and alarms are working.
• Beware of animals, such as rodents, snakes, spiders and insects that may have entered your home. As you inspect your home, tap loudly and often on the floor with a stick to give notice that you are there.
• Damaged objects, such as furniture or stairs, may be unstable. Be very cautious when moving near them. Avoid holding, pushing or leaning against damaged building parts.
• If power is out, use a flashlight. Do not use any open flame, including candles, to inspect for damage or serve as alternate lighting.
• Make temporary repairs such as covering holes, bracing walls, and removing debris.

**Checking your utilities:**

• If there is ANY visible damage to the gas meter, gas lines, or propane tank, **DO NOT** attempt to repair or turn on these services. Call your local propane company or utility.
• Look at the electric meter. If there is visible damage, **DO NOT ATTEMPT** to turn the breaker on.
• If there are electrical wires on the ground, **STAY CLEAR** and contact your local utility immediately.

### Where can I get help?

#### Federal Resources

**FEMA:** As of October 16, 2021, the Alisal Fire has not been declared a federal emergency. If the status were to change, the Federal Emergency Management Agency maintains a website with information about federal assistance for individuals and families impacted by disasters. Should Santa Barbara County become eligible for federal assistance due to the Alisal Fire, information will be posted at [Home | disasterassistance.gov](http://disasterassistance.gov). [Spanish: [Inicio | disasterassistance.gov]]

### Cleaning Up

Ashes and burned areas of your home contain unhealthy materials and should be approached with great care. Wear protective clothing, including long sleeves, long pants, sturdy shoes, and snug N-95 dust masks. It is best not to clean up ash while it is still actively falling.

- **Control:** Try to control the amount of ash particles that get re-suspended into the air. Avoid using any equipment that blows ash into the air such as standard shop vacuums or leaf blowers. Instead, use household vacuums or shop vacuums with HEPA filters.
- **Contain:** Contain ash by gently sweeping indoor and outdoor hard surfaces followed by wet mopping with a damp cloth. Ash may be disposed of in regular trash receptacles or in plastic bags. You may also allow water from cleaning to drain into landscaping as ash will not hurt plants or grass.
- **Capture:** Protect storm drains from ash and any cleaning chemicals used while cleaning by diverting away from storm drains or recapturing. Ash is highly acidic, which in large amounts can be harmful for people, the environment and aquatic life.
- **Homegrown Fruits and Vegetables:** Thoroughly wash fruit and vegetables from your garden before eating. Do not consume any food, beverages or medications that have been exposed to significant smoke, ash, heat, pressure or chemicals.

Professional cleaning of home heating, air conditioning and ventilation systems is recommended once the fire and smoke has subsided. For more information, please visit the Santa Barbara County Air Pollution Control District website at [https://www.ourair.org/](https://www.ourair.org/).

### Insurance claims

- Save all receipts for your fire related expenses, including lodging, supplies and repairs.
- Contact your insurance agent, broker or insurance company as soon as you can to report how, when and where the damage occurred. Provide a general description of the damage.
• Prepare a list of damaged or lost items and provide receipts if possible. Consider photographing or videotaping the damage where it occurred for further documentation to support your claim.
• If possible, keep damaged items or portions of those items until the claims adjuster has visited your home. Do not throw away anything you plan to claim without discussing it with your adjuster first.
• Make copies of all documents and pictures given to your claims adjuster or insurance company. Besides insurance, there are many questions related to taxes, expenses and your personal financial recovery.

Rebuilding

County of Santa Barbara Planning and Development Department (http://sbcountyplanning.org/) will be aware of the difficulties you have experienced and will help you navigate the complexities of building.

California Contractors State License Board Disaster Help Center (http://www.cslb.ca.gov/Media_Room/Disaster_Help_Center/) can assist you in assessing the reputation of any contractor you may be considering for your job.
When you have secured safety outside your home, check inside for fire or fire damage:

- Embers in the attic, which may have entered through vents.
- If electricity is off, before turning it on, make sure all appliances are turned off. Once you are sure all appliances are turned off, there is no fire damage to your building and the meter does not have any visible damage you may turn on the main circuit breaker.
- Check if the phone is working.
- Check if security system and alarms are working.
- Use flashlights to help inspect your home and surrounding area.

After checking your property, continue to use caution and note outdoor conditions:

- Trees & poles with deep charring, particularly if still smoking should be considered hazardous.
- Smoldering holes in the ground can be full of hot coals.
- White ash is evidence of hot material.

If you find any of these conditions:

**FIRE & OTHER EMERGENCIES**
- Stay away and report condition to a local fire or law enforcement official in the area and call 9-1-1.

**DAMAGED UTILITY EQUIPMENT**
- Report electrical problems and damaged equipment to your local utility.

**GAS LEAKS**
- Report electrical problems and damaged equipment to your local utility.

To learn more about wildfire preparedness visit: ReadyForWildfire.org

Returning home after a wildfire:

Once a wildfire has burned through an area, many dangers may remain. Follow these precautions when returning home.

We thank you for your cooperation.
WHEN DRIVING TO YOUR PROPERTY CHECK FOR:

- Trees, brush, and rocks which may be weakened or loosened by fire.
- Trees and brush weakened by fire may lose limbs or fall.
- Rocks loosened by fire may roll and crumble. If rocks have rolled down a slope expect more to follow.
- Debris or damage from fire on roads and driveways.
- Debris on the road near your home and in your driveway.
- Clearing the debris to the edge of your driveway and removing it later will help keep your home safe from fire.
- Utility poles weakened by fire.

AT YOUR PROPERTY, CHECK FOR FIRE OR FIRE DAMAGE:

- Hot embers in rain gutters, on the roof and under overhangs.
- Hot embers under decks and in crawl spaces.
- Hot embers in wood piles, debris piles and lawn.
- If well or pump-house is in working order.
- If your electrical service has not been interrupted you may continue to use your power for such things as pumping water, etc.

IF YOUR SERVICES ARE OFF, CHECK FOR BURNED SERVICE EQUIPMENT & FACILITIES:

- Is there damage to the gas meter, gas lines, or propane tank? If there is ANY visible damage DO NOT attempt to repair or turn on these services. Call your local propane company or utility.
- Look at the electric meter. If there is any visible damage DO NOT ATTEMPT to turn the breaker on.
- If there are electrical wires on the ground STAY CLEAR and contact your local utility immediately.
Cleaning Up After a Fire Disaster

Introduction
Natural and manmade disasters make a profound impact on people, land, animals, the environment and the economy. Each year, the destructive force of wildfires affects thousands of lives. If your home has been in the path of a wildfire, the cleanup process may need some special consideration. Here are some tips for various aspects of cleanup and salvage.

Smoke Damage Cleanup
Smoke damage can be extensive in all areas of the home. Smoke will damage textiles and other surfaces. Follow cleaning instructions recommended by manufacturers. Washable textiles may benefit from adding 1 to 2 cups of vinegar to each wash load. Vinegar will help in removing odor and residue from smoke damage.

Some materials may require three to four washings. Remember that water damage can cause mildew and off odors following a fire, which may require additional enzyme cleaners in order to remove. Your computer and other electrical appliances could also be affected by smoke, heat or water. Check the owner’s manual before operating.

Soot, Ash and Smoke Concerns
Soot and ash can cause minor irritation to eyes and skin and have harmful effects on individuals who are sensitive to debris or have respiratory illnesses or asthma. Encourage individuals with respiratory issues to avoid cleanup and breathing harmful air. Smoke from fire and wildfire can irritate eyes, skin, nose, throat and lungs. Smoke can cause coughing and wheezing and makes it difficult to breathe. Stay indoors and reduce physical activity if you are subject to asthma or heart disease. Wearing a “particulate respirator,” can help protect your lungs from wildfire smoke exposure. Choose masks that have the words “NIOSH” and either “N95” or “P100.” Appropriate masks may be sold at hardware stores and pharmacies. Choose masks that have two straps that go around the head. Do not use masks with only one strap as they do not seal as well to the face. Wearing a mask when cleaning ash from your house can be helpful. When vacuuming use a vacuum with a HEPA (high efficiency particulate absorbing) filter and change the filter often.

Begin the Outside Cleanup Process
When returning to a home that has survived a wildfire, begin cleaning by sweeping the ash off the roof. It is important to also clean the chimney. If the chimney is very dirty, call a professional chimney sweep. Next, clean the house gutters by using a shop vacuum or sweeping out by hand. After the gutters are clean, sweep off the house exterior walls and windows, especially ledges where soot could have built up. Following the house sweeping and soot and ash removal, move on to clean the entire exterior of the home. Wash the house by using the garden hose or a power wash system. Finish by cleaning windows with a window cleaner. Remember to sweep or vacuum the walkways and driveways to remove ash and soot. If you are unable to remove the soot and ash from the lawn, water it lightly with the garden hose for a week, and the soot and ash will recede into the ground.

Here are nine tips taken from FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) for cleaning up your home and property after a fire. http://www.fema.gov/news/
• Pressure wash or scrub all exterior surfaces including walls, walks, drives, decks, windows and screens.
• Wash all interior walls and hard surfaces with a steam cleaner. Don't forget inside cabinets, drawers and closets. Steam undersides of furniture, tables and chairs.
• Launder or dry clean all clothing, linens and bedding.
• Wash all movable items, including picture frames and knick-knacks with a steam cleaner and a soft microfiber cloth.
• Disinfect and deodorize all carpets, window coverings, upholstered furniture and mattresses with steam.
• Upholstery, fabric window treatments, etc., can be spray-treated with deodorizing products available at most supermarkets. Do not use odor masking sprays since they just cover up the problem and don’t last long term. Steam actually melts the tar and neutralizes the odor and carbon film left by forest fire, cigarette smoke or wood burning fireplaces and stoves.

• Have heating, ventilating and air-conditioning units and all ductwork professionally cleaned to remove soot, ash and smoke residue. Change filters when you first return to the premises and at least once a month for the first year.

• Vacuum dry aerial fire retardant or firefighting foam residue from inside the house or car. Pressure wash the home/car exterior, and use a steam cleaner to remove the stuck-on residue from inside surfaces.

• Ash and soot on the ground and in your landscaping will continue to generate smoke odors and airborne particles when the wind blows, so water it down regularly. Until the ash and soot are diluted and absorbed into the environment, run an indoor mechanical air filtration system to help minimize the uncomfortable and potentially health-threatening impact of these pollutants.

**Food that Has Been Exposed to Fire Damage**

Several factors can affect food that has been exposed to fire including heat, toxic fumes, smoke and chemicals used to control the fire. Dispose of any fresh food that shows signs of damage from heat or fire, including ash or smoke. Any food that has come in contact with liquid waste, sewage, chemicals and flood waters may be damaged and should not be consumed. Any food displaying an off odor or signs of spoilage should also be thrown out.

If food such as grains or flour is caked, doesn’t flow freely, or is contaminated with ash, water, or chemicals, discard and replace. Excessive heat produced by fires can influence the safety of stored food. If the heat of the fire doesn’t cause the jar to break, high temperatures can cause some bacteria to spoil commercial or home-canned food. High temperatures can cause jar lids of home-canned food to come unsealed, allowing bacteria to get into the food. The jar lid may “seal” again when the temperature drops, causing an unsafe jar to appear safe. It is recommended that any home-canned food that has been exposed to the heat of fire be discarded. The jars may be reused but the food inside should be thrown away.

Toxic fumes can be released from burning materials and can contaminate food. Throw away food stored in permeable or semi-permeable packaging such as cardboard and plastic wrap. Also, home-canned food and food in screw-top jars may have been adversely affected by heat and toxic fumes and need to be thrown away. If a wildfire caused evacuation from your home and power was not available to keep refrigerators and freezers running, check food immediately since it may have spoiled. Frozen food still containing ice crystals can safely be refrozen, but discard any refrigerated food if the refrigerator temperature reached 40 F or higher. Place spoiled food in heavy trash bags and seal. Do not let bags come in contact with children or pets. Use clean, potable water for drinking and cleaning. After food has been removed, clean inside surfaces with a solution of dish soap and water. Use a mixture of 2 tablespoons of baking soda to 1 quart of water to help remove odors.

**Preparedness**

Preparedness is a critical element in our lives. Be prepared by making or purchasing a 72-hour emergency kit containing, water, food, clothing and other special items your family may need. Being prepared will help to alleviate fear and provide life-sustaining items. Keep the kit in a location that is familiar to all family members and easily accessed. Remember to keep cell phones charged and automobiles fueled if the time arises for you to leave an area. Natural disasters can affect our lives, yet being prepared is the best way to reduce fear and avoid stress.
Food Safety After a Power Outage

Is food in the refrigerator safe during a power outage?

Food should be safe as long as power is out no more than 4 hours. Keep the door closed as much as possible. Discard any perishable foods (such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and leftovers) that have been above 41 °F for over 4 hours.

Never taste food to determine its safety! You can’t rely on appearance or odor to determine whether food is safe (please contact your local solid waste hauler for proper disposal).

What do I do if my refrigerator has been out of power for an extended period?

If your refrigerator has been non-operational for an extended period of time the food inside it has gone bad. Perishable food products like raw meats, vegetables, etc. when not held at refrigeration exude potentially hazardous juices. These juices contaminate not only your other food products but also your refrigerator. Discard any items in the refrigerator that have come into contact with raw meat juices.

When cleaning your refrigerator or freezer, please avoid increasing the contamination area by containing the spill as much as possible by using a basin or restricting it to a certain area.

After gathering the potential hazardous food properly dispose of any spoiled or questionable food by double bagging it and throwing it in the trash.

Remember Safety First: Use gloves and safety glasses

How do I clean and sanitize my refrigerator after disposing of potentially hazardous food?

Use the following cleaning and sanitizing method to clean and disinfect:

1. **Wash** with soap and water; ensure that any dirt, silt or chemicals are brushed or wiped away
2. **Rinse** with clean water
3. **Sanitize** by using water and bleach solution (1 tablespoon of bleach per gallon of water)
4. **Air dry**

**WASH, RINSE and SANITIZE other food contact surfaces.**

**WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!**
Floods follow fires.
Wildfires raise your flood risk for years.

Wildfires leave the ground charred, barren, and unable to absorb water. That means even light rain can potentially turn into a financially devastating flash flood or mudflow. Just one inch of floodwater in your home can cause $25,000 of damage.

But with flood insurance, you have peace of mind knowing that you can recover more quickly. It helps cover the cost of repairing your home and replacing your belongings.

Most homeowners and renters insurance policies do not cover flood damage, and flood insurance policies don’t automatically renew. Call your insurance agent today or learn more at FloodSmart.gov/wildfire.