Returning Home After A Wildfire

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT of FORESTRY and FIRE PROTECTION

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Once a wildfire has burned through an area, many dangers could remain. Firefighters and utility workers begin restoring fire damaged areas as soon as they can. Making the area safe for the public can take multiple days. Stay out of the evacuation area until fire officials tell you it is safe to return. It is extremely important to be aware of the hazards and know what to look for when the evacuation order is lifted.

- When driving, watch for trees, brush, and rocks which may have been weakened or loosened by the fire. Be aware of any debris or damage on roads and driveways. Continue to use caution in the area. Traffic may be delayed, or lanes reduced due to the repair and firefighter operations.

- Use extreme caution around trees, power poles and other tall objects or structures that may have been weakened by fire. Be aware that trees with deep charring are weakened. Smoldering holes in the ground can be full of hot coals and white ash. This is evidence of hot material and should be avoided.

- Before inspecting your home, check for the smell of gas. Use a battery-powered flashlight to inspect a damaged home. Check for hot embers in rain gutters, on the roof, under overhangs, under decks and crawl spaces. Be sure your wood and debris piles are not hiding any embers. Check for 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. If the electric meter has any visible damage, do not attempt to turn the breakers on. If there are electrical wires on the ground, stay clear and contact your local utility company immediately.

- Do not drink water from the faucet until emergency officials say it is okay, water supply systems can be damaged and become polluted during wildfires.

- Discard any food that has been exposed to heat, smoke, flood waters, or soot. Items in your refrigerator are also spoiled and need to be discarded.

- If you have a propane tank or natural gas, leave valves closed until the supplier or utilities can inspect your system. If your propane or utility services have any visible damage to the gas meter, gas lines or propane tank, do not attempt to repair. Call your local propane company or utility.

- If you have a heating oil tank system, contact a heating oil supplier for an inspection of your system before you use it.

- If you have a solar electrical system, this system should be inspected by a licensed technician to verify that the solar panels and electrical wiring are safe for continues operation.

For more information on returning home after a wildfire and other great tips visit:
https://www.readyforwildfire.org/post-wildfire/after-a-wildfire/