



## Food Safety and Reopening Your Business After a Fire

Smoke, heat damage, chemical exposures, spoiled food and water damage are just some of the possible issues that may affect your business after a fire. **As the operator of your business, you must ensure that all food is safe to eat and your facility can operate in a safe and sanitary manner before you consider reopening.**

In many cases, **the following checklist can be used to help you recover after a fire and resume operations more quickly.** Once you complete the checklist, contact your local Environmental Health Officer (EHO) to see whether an inspection is required given your individual circumstances.

- ❖ Make sure to document all actions taken to bring your establishment back into operation, including equipment servicing records.

Your local EHO is also available to answer any questions or concerns you may have as well. Contact information may be found [here](#). If a fire (e.g. a wildfire) has affected multiple facilities, getting an inspection from your local EHO may be delayed.

### 1. Plan your return and ensure building is safe to re-enter

Whether the fire affecting your business is small or large, **always make sure it is safe to re-enter your business before doing so.**

#### Consult with local government

- Contact appropriate agencies involved, such as the local building department or fire department to determine whether the building is safe to re-enter.
- Depending on the scope of the fire, a local emergency operations centre may have been activated and, if so, they will also notify the public when it is safe to return to areas affected by the fire.

#### Review your insurance

- Contact your insurance company as soon as possible so they can help you determine how the insurance assessment and coverage works for your facility.

#### Prepare for clean up

- Arrange for accredited restoration and cleaning, where necessary.
- Obtain personal protection equipment (goggles, gloves, aprons etc.) needed for the clean-up.

#### Ensure building safety

- Ensure the electricity, hot and cold running water, sewerage and gas utilities have been restored or are in proper working order. If you smell gas, contact Fortis BC at 1 (800) 663-9911 and do not re-enter until you are told it is safe.
- Ensure any area where dry ice is being used is well ventilated, or provide oxygen breathing apparatus for anyone entering

## 2. Review the risks and status of your water supply

### Consult with your water system provider

- If your building is connected to a community water system, [check here](#) to see if the system is on a Drinking Water Advisory. If it is, you will need to follow the required procedures outlined in the document, [Drinking Water Public Notifications: What Food Premises Operators Need to Know](#).
  - Talk with the drinking water system provider if you have any questions

### Follow your Emergency Response Plan

- If your facility has its own water supply system, you should follow your Emergency Response Plan and review the document, [Information for Water Suppliers Impacted by Emergencies](#).
  - Clean tap screens, if possible.
  - Ensure that your water system has not been damaged or contaminated.
  - Flush all lines by running the tap for a minimum of 5 minutes.
  - Sampling may also be necessary to confirm the water quality is safe.
    - If you suspect that there may be damage to the water system, schedule for repairs to be done.
    - Talk to your [Environmental Health Officer](#) if you have any questions.

## 3. Review the risks and status of any onsite sewage disposal systems

- If your business has an on-site sewage disposal system, it may become unsafe to use if it is impacted directly by fire, damaged by heavy equipment or machinery, or had power outages.
  - If you find your sewage system was at risk of being impacted by a fire or is not operating as intended (plumbing is slow to drain, smells or pooling on the field area, etc.) then you should contact an Authorized Person to assess your system to ensure it is safe for use.
    - Visit Sewerage, Subdivisions & Healthier Industries (IH) to [find more info on how to find an Authorized Person](#) who can inspect and/or repair an onsite sewerage system, or to locate your On-Site Sewage Record.

## 4. Clean and Sanitize Equipment and Surfaces

### Clean your food premises

- Keep refrigeration unit doors closed until the building has been ventilated of smoke and fumes to prevent foods from being contaminated.
- Consider hiring a professional cleaning service or restoration company to do the cleaning and restoration work. It is recommended that you contact a professional familiar with food services operations to clean your ducts and ventilation systems.
- Discard all absorbent materials (e.g. carpet, drywall, etc.) that have been water or fire damaged (due to the potential for mould growth).
- Discard all damaged equipment, utensils, linens and single service items.

- ❑ Discard soft porous plastics, such as plastic utensils and dishes, pacifiers, baby bottle nipples, and wooden items that have been exposed to water damage from fire fighting.
- ❑ Check for the presence of stored chemical containers, which may have ruptured from falling debris, heat, leaking fuels, storage batteries, anti-freeze, exploding or leaking electrical transformers (including the possible presence of PCBs), and melting electrical insulation. Identify compromised containers and respond according to the chemical involved.
- ❑ Ensure handwashing basins are operational, stocked with hand soap and paper towels, and accessible.

### **Clean food contact surfaces**

- ❑ Clean and sanitize food contact surfaces. This is an important step prior to reopening. Refer to your Sanitation Plan for required cleaning and sanitizing steps.
  - Wear appropriate protective equipment while cleaning and sanitizing.

### **Clean non-food contact surfaces**

- ❑ Check building for any signs of pest infestation and take actions to clean and sanitize affected surfaces. Also, ensure pest access points are eliminated. Refer to your Sanitation Plan for required cleaning and sanitizing steps
- ❑ Minimize traffic in and out of walk-in coolers and freezers until the floors have been cleaned.
  - Contaminants can be brought in to walk-ins on clothing and shoes. Even though a surface may look clean, chemicals from extinguishers and fine particles may be on surfaces of equipment and utensils.
- ❑ Use a vacuum that has a “HEPA” air filter and change the HEPA filter often.
- ❑ Steam clean carpets, drapes, curtains or furniture that has not been smoke or water damaged. Change the water frequently.

### **Assess and clean all equipment**

- ❑ Check the manufacturer’s requirements prior to cleaning as some pieces of equipment, such as pop/slushy machines, coolers, beverage and syrup dispensing lines and water vending equipment and ice machines as these may have special cleaning requirements.
- ❑ Run an empty dishwasher through the wash-rinse-sanitize cycle three times, to flush the water lines and clean and sanitize the interior of the dishwasher prior to use.
- ❑ If you are keeping your fridge or freezer, remove or discard items, and then follow the steps below:
  - ❑ Unplug the fridge and freezer.
  - ❑ Rinse or blow out dust residue on fridge and freezer coils and compressors.
- ❑ Clean and sanitize the inside. Refer to your Sanitation Plan for required cleaning and sanitizing steps:
  - ❑ Leave the doors of the fridge and freezer open to help them dry.
  - ❑ Reconnect the power once the appliance is dry.
  - ❑ Wait until the inside temperature of the fridge has reached 4°C and the freezer is at -18°C before restocking with food.

- Verify that all equipment used for food preparation (e.g., cooking, cooling, and reheating) can operate according to the manufacturer's specifications/instructions.

## 5. Assess food and beverages affected by fire and smoke

### Sort and discard damaged foods

Food can be damaged or contaminated from being exposed to unsafe temperatures, smoke, ash, soot, water, fire retardant chemicals, and physical damage from falling debris, and loss of power during a fire.

- Sort the salvageable from the non-salvageable foods, and discard damaged and unsafe food products.
- Discard foods/items exposed to ash, soot, water and smoke, regardless of where they were stored (i.e., fridges, freezers, cupboards and drawers), including:
  - Foods showing any signs of being damaged or contamination.
  - ALL opened food packages and foods that were left uncovered (e.g. in display cases).
  - Foods having an "off" odour or taste.
  - Foods packaged in permeable packaging, including paper, foil, cardboard boxes, plastic wrap or cellophane.
  - Bottles and jars of food with screw top lids or crown/crimp caps and Tupperware-type containers.
  - Single service items/utensils which include those that have been individually plastic wrapped.
  - Ice in both serving bins and ice machines.
  - Dented or bulging cans.
- Do not consume or use fruit or vegetables from local or backyard gardens that were exposed to fire retardants.

### Discard foods that have not been kept at safe temperatures

- Discard potentially hazardous food stored at 4 degree Celsius or greater for more than 2 hours.
  - If the fire caused a power outage, review precautions and practices for food safety outlined in [Power Outages at Food Facilities](#).

### Clean and sanitize sealed & undamaged canned foods

- Food in sealed, undamaged cans may be salvageable if exposed to smoke only (no heat damage). Clean and sanitize the canned foods/drinks by immersing them for two minutes in a mild bleach solution created by mixing 2.5 mL (1/2 tsp) bleach for every litre (4 cups) of water.
  - Before washing, remove the can's label and mark the can's contents in indelible ink.

**WHEN IN DOUBT,  
THROW IT OUT**