

Food Safety and Reopening Your Business after a Wildfire

Smoke, heat damage, chemical exposures, spoiled food and water damage are just some of the issues that must be dealt with before reopening your business after a wildfire. As the permitted operator you are responsible for ensuring that all food is safe to eat, and your facility still meets regulatory requirements before you reopen.

In many cases, the following checklist can be used to help you recover after a wildfire and resume operations more quickly. Once you complete the checklist, contact your local Environmental Health Officer (EHO) to see whether or not a formal inspection is still required given your individual circumstances. Due to the high number of facilities likely impacted by the wildfire, it might take some time before your premises can be inspected. If you have questions, concerns, or would like your establishment to be inspected prior to re-opening, you should also contact your local EHO. The contact list for EHO's can be found at: <https://www.interiorhealth.ca/YourEnvironment/AirQuality/Documents/Health%20Protection%20Offices%20Contacts.pdf>

1. Plan your return and recovery

- Contact your insurance company as soon as possible so they can help you determine how the insurance coverage works for your facility.
- Arrange for accredited restoration and cleaning, where necessary.
- Obtain personal protection equipment (goggles, gloves, aprons etc.) needed for the clean-up.
- When re-entry is allowed review any inventory and equipment lists for insurance purposes and to assess whether they can be salvaged. .

2. Building Safety and Utility Check

The local emergency operations centre will notify the public when it is safe to return to affected areas.

- Contact appropriate agencies such as the local building department and the fire department to determine if the building is safe to re-enter.
- 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.
- Check building for signs of pest infestation and address accordingly.

3. Review the risks and status of your water supply

- Clean tap screens if possible.
- Ensure that your water system has not been damaged or contaminated. All lines will need to be flushed by running the tap for a minimum of 5 minutes.
- If you are on a Boil Water Notice you will need to follow the required procedures outlined in the document, *Drinking Water Public Notifications: What Food Premises Operators Need to Know*, which can be found through the following link:
<https://www.interiorhealth.ca/YourEnvironment/FoodSafety/Documents/Public%20Notification%20Health%20Hazards%20Related%20to%20DW%20in%20Food%20Premises.pdf>
- 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* located on Interior Health's Public Website at
https://www.interiorhealth.ca/YourEnvironment/Emergency/Wildfires/Documents/HP-WQ-9089_Water%20Suppliers%20Impacted%20by%20Emergency%20Events.pdf

4. Food and beverages affected by fire and smoke

Sort the salvageable from the non-salvageable foods as quickly as possible and assess and discard damaged and unsafe food products. Food can be damaged from being exposed to unsafe temperatures, smoke, ash, soot, water, fire retardant chemicals, and loss of power during a fire.

- a) 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 signs of smoke damage and foods having an "off" odour or taste including ALL opened food packages.
 - 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.
- b) Clean and sanitize closed, undamaged canned foods/drinks exposed only to smoke** by immersing them for two minutes in a mild bleach solution created by mixing 5 mL (1 tsp) bleach for every litre (4 cups) of water.
- c) Do not consume or use fruit or vegetables from local or backyard gardens that were exposed to fire retardants.**
- d) If the fire caused a power outage, review precautions and practices for food safety** outlined in *Power Outages at Food Facilities* at
<https://www.interiorhealth.ca/YourEnvironment/Emergency/Wildfires/Documents/After%20Fire-Power%20Outages%20at%20Food%20Facilities.pdf>.

When in doubt, throw it out.

5. Cleaning and Sanitizing Equipment and Surfaces

Minimize traffic coming 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. During clean up, use a vacuum that has a “HEPA” air filter and change the HEPA filter often.

Depending on the size of the area you may wish to hire 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**.

Cleaning and sanitizing is an important step prior to reopening. If you are self-cleaning and sanitizing the premises, ensure you **wear appropriate protective equipment**.

Check with manufacturer’s requirements prior to cleaning as some pieces of equipment, such as pop/slushy machines, coolers 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.
- Discard all absorbent materials (e.g. carpet, drywall, etc.) that have been water or fire damaged (due to the potential for mould growth).
- Steam clean carpets, drapes, curtains or furniture that has not been smoke or water damaged. Change the water frequently.
- If you are keeping your fridge or freezer, remove or discard items, and then follow the steps below:
 1. Unplug the fridge and freezer.
 2. Rinse or blow out dust residue on fridge and freezer coils and compressors.
 3. Clean and sanitize the inside using the procedure noted above.
 4. Leave the doors of the fridge and freezer open to help them dry.
 5. Once the appliance is dry, reconnect the power.
 6. Wait until the inside temperature of the fridge has reached 4°C and the freezer is at -18°C before restocking with food.

Discard all damaged equipment, utensils, linens and single service items.

Other Considerations before Opening to the Public

- If your property is on a septic system directly impacted by fire, it should be assessed by an Authorized Person. See <https://www.interiorhealth.ca/YourEnvironment/HBE/Pages/Onsite-Sewerage-Systems.aspx> for more information on finding an Authorized Person.
- Verify that all equipment used for food preparation (e.g., cooking, cooling, and reheating) can operate according to the manufacturer’s specifications/instructions.
- Ensure handwashing basins are operational, stocked with hand soap and paper towels, and accessible.
- Ensure procedures are in place to provide potable water.
- Document all activities that have been undertaken to bring your establishment back into operation, including equipment servicing records.