



## **Returning to Your Neighborhood**

Visiting your property for the first time since the evacuation will be an emotional experience and we want you to know that you are not alone—there are many people and agencies here to help you. This loss of a physical home, a shelter, a place of security, filled with memories, is difficult to bear. For many, a sense of home comes from neighbors and from the wider community. The building you called home may be gone, but your community is with you to help you recover and rebuild. We extend our deepest sympathy to you and your family and we want you to know that we are committed to assuring you have access to the services and support you need. Please familiarize yourself with the information in this packet. It contains important details about the hazards of entering an area that has been in a fire.

### **What Has Occurred in Your Neighborhood since the Fire**

Crews have assessed safety hazards and removed utility lines and environmental hazards. Utility providers have gone through to shut off gas, electrical and water services.

### **What to Expect When You Arrive in Your Neighborhood**

Once evacuation orders are lifted, you will need to get an entry pass. Entry passes will be distributed at check in locations. Once you have received an entry pass you may enter your neighborhood through the official entry point.

### **Taking Care of Yourself and Your Family**

**Know that You Have the Right to Privacy:** The media has helped us stay connected and informed during these devastating fires; part of that coverage has included personal stories about how people's lives have been impacted. You and your family are under no obligation to consent to be interviewed, photographed or filmed. If approached by a member of the media (reporter, camera person, photographer), you have the right to request your privacy.

As you return to your property our focus will be on providing you with safe, secure, and private time to evaluate your situation. We have asked that the media be respectful of this highly personal and difficult time, as you return to your neighborhood and reunite with friends and neighbors, evaluate your losses, and determine next steps.

**Looking Through the Remains of Your Property:** Sifting for valuables is permitted but not recommended for health reasons. Small scale sifting through ashes to locate remaining personal items will not impact your ability to get financial assistance. Please be advised that



digging, piling materials up or moving large pieces on or off the property can jeopardize your eligibility for state and federally sponsored cleanup and could put your health at risk.

If you choose to search through the remains of your home, wear proper protective equipment and take the following precautions:

- Wear sturdy shoes, long sleeve shirts and long pants.
- Wear protective gear such as gloves, protective masks and goggles.
- Keep children and pets away.
- Anything with ash should be sanitized and cleaned.
- Asbestos, heavy metals, by-products of plastic combustion and various other chemicals may be present in your home and neighborhood.
- Walk around the perimeter before entering, noting any debris and structure that could fall.

**Emotional Support** is important for all who experienced this disaster. The emotional toll can be devastating and further compounded the financial strains of losing your home, business, or personal property. Profound sadness, grief, and anger are normal reactions to an event such as this. During your return to your neighborhood emotional support services will be available including mental health providers and clergy.

## **Safety When Returning To Your Home or Business after a Fire**

A fire in a home can cause serious damage, and in some cases total loss. The building and many of the items in your home or business may have been badly damaged by flames, heat, smoke, and water. You may find things that the fire did not burn up but are now ruined by smoke and soggy with water used to put out the flames. Anything that you want to save or reuse will need to be carefully cleaned. Firefighters may have cut holes in the walls of the building to look for hidden flames. They may have cut holes in the roof to let out heat and smoke. Cleanup will take time and patience.

### **General Safety Tips: USE CAUTION!**

- Wear sturdy shoes (steel toes and shanks are recommended), a mask, and clothing.
- Hazardous chemicals and conditions may be present.
- Inspect propane tanks for visible damage before turning on.



- Wear protective gear when sorting through possessions. Anything in contact with ash should be sanitized and cleaned. Sorting through/cleaning burn debris is not recommended for health reasons.
- Be aware of slip, trip, fall, and puncture hazards.

It is important to understand the risk to your safety and health even after the fire is out. The soot and dirty water left behind could make you ill. Be very careful if you touch any fire-damaged items.

Ask the advice of the fire department, local building officials, your insurance agent, and restoration specialists before starting to clean or make repairs. Do not eat, drink, or breathe in anything that has been near the flames, smoke soot, or water used to put the fire out.

### **Safety**

Fire ash may be irritating to the skin, nose, and throat may cause coughing and/or nose bleeds. Fine particles can be inhaled deeply into lungs and may aggravate asthma and may make it difficult to breathe.

- **Refrain from cleaning ash and fire debris until professional hazardous material cleanup services are secured. Seek professional damage and debris removal/restoration services.**
- When exposure to dust or ash cannot be avoided, use a well-fitted NIOSH-certified air-purifying respirator N-95 mask.
- Children should not be in the vicinity while cleanup is in progress. Even if care is exercised, it is easy to stir up ash that may contain hazardous substances.
- Clean ash off house pets and other domesticated animals if they have been in contaminated areas.
- It is best to not allow pets in these areas due to the potential risk to their health and their ability to spread outside of contaminated areas.
- Wear gloves, long-sleeved shirts, and long pants to avoid skin contact. Goggles are recommended. Contact with wet ash may cause chemical burns or irritation on skin. Change your shoes and clothing prior to leaving the decontamination site, to avoid tracking ash into your car, home, etc.