

AFTER THE FIRE

This leaflet contains information to help you manage the effects of fire or flooding in your home.

Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service will do its best to limit the damage and try to alleviate your immediate problems.

This leaflet guides you to the other agencies who are there to provide help and advice.



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Health

Inhaling hot smoke can harm the delicate tissues of the respiratory system. The full extent of the damage may only become apparent days after the incident itself.

There are three major problems associated with smoke inhalation:

- Heat damage
- Asphyxiation
- Irritation of the lung tissues

Any problems usually present themselves within six to 24 hours of inhaling smoke. If you think you are suffering as a result of smoke inhalation, you need to go to the accident and emergency department of your nearest hospital immediately.

Accommodation

If you have any doubts about the accommodation being fit to live in after the fire, contact your local social services or housing department.

Safety and security

After a fire has been extinguished, the building retains heat for some time. You may hear noises coming from the area involved in the fire. This is caused by the cooling down of certain materials used in the construction of the building.

Fires produce large volumes of smoke and hot gases. Firefighters remove these to lessen the damage caused by a fire. Ventilation must take place quickly to reduce fire spread and smoke damage.

Firefighters may also have to break windows and open walls and ceilings to make sure that any hidden fires are extinguished. The damage may appear unnecessary, but firefighters must ensure there is no possibility of undetected fire causing further damage.

Salvage sheets may be used to cover any damage to your roof. In some cases these sheets may need to be returned to us. As soon as you can make alternative arrangements, please contact us so that we can remove them. If the sheets are not returned after a certain period of time, we will have to charge you for them. Obviously we don't want it to come to that. The officer in charge will let you know when we need the sheets back.

If you have to leave your property unattended, close and lock all doors and windows. If this is not possible, look for the services of a boarding-up contractor and inform your local police.

Gas, water and electricity

Your gas, water and electricity may have been disconnected by the firefighters dealing with your incident. For your safety, you should not attempt to reconnect these services by yourself.

A qualified plumber should carry out all repairs to water fittings, tanks and pipe work. If you turn on the water before these repairs have been carried out, you might be inviting a flood.

If your gas installation, meter or appliances have been affected by fire they will need to be inspected. Any problems must be rectified before your supply is turned on. Make sure the gas installer is registered with the Gas Safe Register.

Your electricity supply may have been turned off for the safety of firefighters. If your internal electricity supply has been damaged by fire, your electricity company will have to reconnect the supply after a qualified electrician has carried out rewiring and notified them that the work has been completed.

Fire safety

If one or more of your battery-operated smoke alarms activated during the fire, you will need to replace the batteries. If a detector has been subjected to high temperatures and/or damage by smoke, you will need to replace it as soon as possible. This applies to all types of smoke alarm. We will carry out a free safety check of the fire risks in your home and provide fire safety advice at the time. Alternatively, ring **01296 744477** or send an email to **cs@bucksfire.gov.uk** to arrange this afterwards. Visit our website at **www.bucksfire.gov.uk** for further fire safety advice.

Chimney fires

After a fire, the chimney may remain hot for several hours. Don't be alarmed if your chimney makes creaking noises after the fire has been extinguished – these are caused by the chimney cooling down.

- Put a non-combustible container in the fireplace and half fill it with water. This will catch any hot debris falling from the chimney.
- Put a fireguard around the fireplace.
- Don't relight the fire until you have had the chimney swept – you should get this done as soon as possible.
- Have any metal flues checked by an installer before they are used again.
- If you own a very old house or thatched cottage, we will have taken extra precautions to make sure the fire hasn't spread to hidden beams. Additional risk information is available in a separate safety leaflet, "Thatched properties".
- If you have any cause to think that you still have a problem, call 999 again.

Vehicle fires

If your car has been involved in a fire, it is your responsibility to remove it from the roadway. If you are not a member of a break-down organisation such as the AA or RAC, the police may call out a local garage on your behalf to remove it. A charge will be made for this service, but you can often claim this back on your car insurance. Remove all valuables including your tax disc and any important documents.

Notify your insurance company of all the circumstances as soon as possible.

It is not necessary to tell the police about a car fire unless it happened as a result of a collision or you think someone started it deliberately.

Cleaning up

A number of cleaning and maintenance contractors offer a cleaning service after a fire. The larger companies have facilities to remove the smell of smoke and offer a specialist freeze drying system for salvaging documents, electrical equipment, works of art and other valuable items damaged by water.

Ventilation and gentle heat will speed up the drying out process, helping to prevent rotting as well as reducing lingering smoke and soot smells. Use a dehumidifier rather than a paraffin or gas heater.

Food and drink exposed to heat and smoke, and frozen food that has thawed, must be thrown out. If in doubt, throw it out! Cooking utensils, cutlery and pans need thorough cleaning before use.

Any medicines that have been contaminated must be replaced. Contact your doctor's surgery or local pharmacist for advice.

Insurance

Damage to building or fitting: Contact your buildings cover insurer or mortgager for a claim form. Ask what immediate expenditure can be made before a loss adjuster sees the damage, particularly if the building is unsafe.

Damage to contents: Contact your home contents insurer for a claim form if the contents of your property have been damaged. You will need to list everything that is damaged, by what and its replacement value.

If the damage to either building or contents is really severe, consider employing your own insurance assessor to help you with your claim, if you anticipate difficulties. Never employ a doorstep loss adjuster.

Charges and costs

Before committing yourself to high expenditure, always check with your insurer if the cost is reclaimable. Charges will be made if building control or police officers have to do anything to make an area safe to the public – for example removing a vehicle, putting up public safety fencing or shoring up unsafe buildings.

Assistance

You may be able to get assistance from these agencies:

Accommodation

Your local authority (see list below)

■ Aylesbury Vale District Council
01296 585858
www.aylesburyvaledc.gov.uk

■ Chiltern District Council
01494 729000
www.chiltern.gov.uk

■ Milton Keynes Council
01908 691691
www.milton-keynes.gov.uk

■ South Bucks District Council
01895 837200
www.southbucks.gov.uk

■ Wycombe District Council
01494 461000
www.wycombe.gov.uk

Financial problems

Department for Work and Pensions
www.dwp.gov.uk

Legal/general advice

Citizens Advice Bureau
www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Social services

Buckinghamshire County Council

0845 3708090

www.buckscc.gov.uk

Milton Keynes Council

01908 691691

www.milton-keynes.gov.uk

Lost or destroyed personal documents

If your personal documents have been lost or destroyed, the following contacts list may be helpful. Many government departments can be reached by following the links at www.direct.gov.uk

Birth/death/marriage/adoption certificates

Certificate Services Section

General Register Office

PO Box 2

Southport

Merseyside

PR8 2JD

Tel: 0845 603 7788

www.gro.gov.uk

Driving Licence

DVLA, Swansea, SA99 1AT.

0870 240 0009

www.dvla.gov.uk

Vehicle documents

DVLC, Swansea, SA99 1AT.

0870 240 0010

Passports/Visas

UK Passport Information

0870 521 0410

www.ips.gov.uk

Personal finance and credit cards

Contact your banks and building societies who will arrange for duplicates to be sent to you.

Medical records

Original documents will be held at your GP surgery, health centre or hospital.

Tax records

The local tax office holds details of personal tax records. Your employer will know which tax office to contact.

Insurance policies

Contact the local or head office of your insurance company who will be able to provide replacement documentation.

Divorce decree

Contact the original court office where the decree was made. Your solicitor may be able to help.

Wills

Contact the Citizens Advice Bureau or your solicitor.

Stocks/Bonds/Title Deeds

Contact your solicitor or broker as they may have your details. The Post Office will be able to give you details on how to obtain duplicates of Post Office Bonds.

Benefit documents

Contact the Department for Work and Pensions

Warranties and guarantees

The manufacturers hold main registration cards or documents. Contact them and explain the situation.

Other useful contacts

British Red Cross

The Fire and Emergency Support Service, delivered by trained British Red Cross volunteers using a specially adapted vehicle, provides practical help and emotional support to vulnerable people affected by a domestic fire or similar incident.

Tel: 01296 739300

Website: www.redcross.org.uk

RSPCA

Tel: 0300 1234 555

Website: www.rspca.org

Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service

Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service is committed to providing a quality service, 24 hours a day, which meets the need of those we protect and serve. Please contact us if you would like to comment on the service we have provided you with or the contents of this leaflet.

Address: Brigade Headquarters, Stocklake, Aylesbury, HP20 1BD

Tel: 01296 744400

Minicom: 01296 432333

Fax: 01296 744600

Email: cs@bucksfire.gov.uk

Website: www.bucksfire.gov.uk

Thames Valley Police

Tel: 0845 8 505 505

Website: www.thamesvalley.police.uk



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