

After the fire



Tasmania Fire Service



Picking up the pieces



**Secure
& protect**



**Health &
safety**



**Salvage
hints**

**+
more**

Now that the fire is out, there are a few things you need to know.

This book gives you advice about what to do in the hours and days after a fire.

It will also help keep you safe and speed up your recovery after a fire.

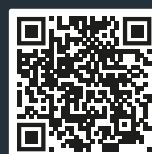
The unthinkable has happened: your home has been damaged or destroyed by fire. While what has happened to you may be difficult to understand and accept, there are things you can do right now to begin rebuilding your life and your home.

There are organisations and people who can help you do this. Your starting point is securing and protecting your property.

If you need professional support to help you through this difficult period, contact your GP. Lifeline (13 11 14) also provides confidential 24-hour counselling, support and referral.

The Tasmania Fire Service offers this booklet to help you through this difficult time.

To find out more, go to www.fire.tas.gov.au



Important steps for your safe and speedy recovery after a house fire.

The following steps take you through exactly what to do after a house fire and will help you get started on the road to recovery.



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Step 1

Secure & protect your property



If an investigation needs to take place, your home will be secured until the investigation is complete. Entry to the property will be controlled by the Tasmania Fire Service and Tasmania Police. Once the investigation is complete, you will control access to your property.

The owner of the building or structure is responsible for making sure that any openings are secure and only approved access to the site is permitted. External doors and openings to the structure should be secured and locked. This can be done by using plywood sheeting to board up entry points or by using temporary fencing to keep people off the property.

In rented premises the occupier is responsible for informing the estate agent, landlord or Housing Tasmania of the fire.

Assistance with site security can be obtained from:

- Insurance companies (depending on your level of insurance)
- General building contractors
- A building firm.

If you are in need of temporary housing, contact your insurance company or local community services for advice.

If you are a Housing Tasmania tenant, contact them as soon as possible to tell them what has happened. They can help arrange temporary housing for you.

Your home may need to be protected from any further damage by weather, theft or vandalism, depending on the degree and nature of damage.

Handy hints

- ✓ Make a list of all items on site and do not remove anything from the site until you have completed your list.

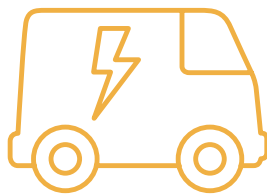
Step 2

Your health & safety



Do not re-enter a damaged property unnecessarily as it can be very dangerous. The utilities (gas, electricity or water) to the site may have been shut off or disconnected by the Tasmania Fire Service or other agencies.

Electricity and gas supply



If you are unsure of whether something is safe, ask a relevant qualified tradesperson for advice. Household wiring and appliances (gas or electric) must be inspected by a qualified tradesperson before the appliance is reconnected or utilities are restored to the site.

Building safety

Buildings or structures affected by fire can easily become unsafe. Walls, roofs and ceilings can give way without warning, and floors or stairs may not be as sound as they appear. A building inspector will be required to ensure structural safety before you re-enter the building. Your insurance company (depending on your level of insurance) will contact a building inspector, or the local council's building inspector may be of assistance.

Fires may restart from hidden, smouldering items. If this happens contact the Tasmania Fire Service immediately on 000.



Food

Throw away any food, beverages or medicines exposed to heat, smoke or water damage. Refrigerators and freezers left unopened will hold their temperature for a short time, but do not re-freeze frozen food that may have thawed during the incident.

Handy hints

- ✓ Get rest and drink plenty of water.
- ✓ Reach out and accept help from others.
- ✓ Realise that sometimes recovery can take time.



Step 3

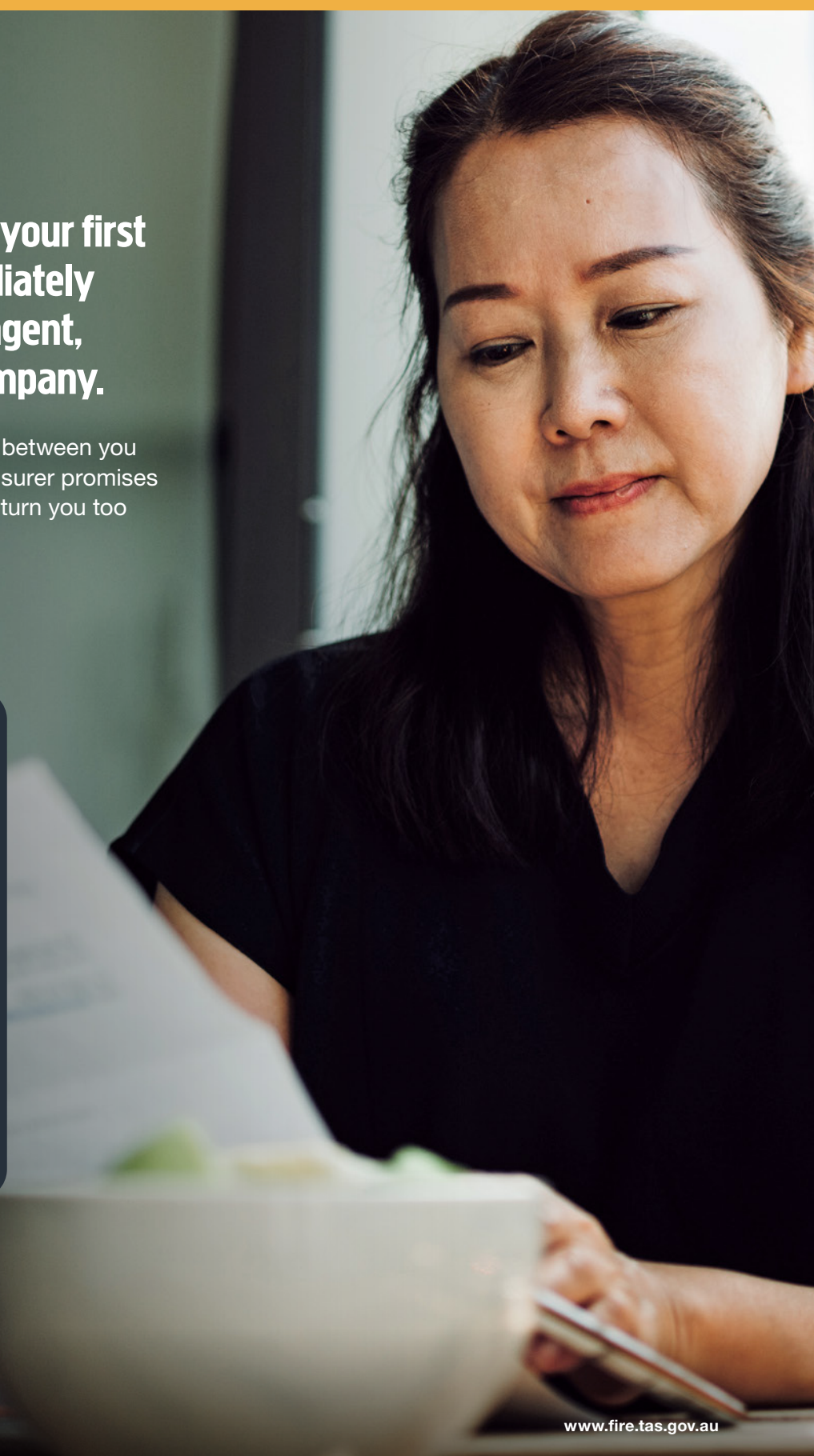
Insurance & recovering financially

After a fire loss, one of your first obligations is to immediately notify your insurance agent, broker or insurance company.

Your insurance policy is a contract between you and the insurance company. The insurer promises to do certain things for you, and in turn you too have some obligations.

Handy hints

- ✓ Make copies of all documents and pictures given to your claims adjuster or insurance company.
- ✓ Consider photographing or videotaping the damage where it occurred for further documentation to support your claim.





- ✔ Advise the claims manager of loss or damage and provide them with a forwarding address and telephone number if circumstances have meant leaving the damaged home.
- ✔ It is important that you protect your property and take reasonable precautions from further damage or losses from weather, theft or vandalism, such as covering any holes in the roof or walls. Your insurance company will provide you with advice. The insurance company may refuse to pay losses that occur after the fire.
- ✔ Make a list of damaged personal property, detailing the quantity, description, original purchase price, purchase date, damage estimate and replacement; refer to your insurance contract for further advice.
- ✔ It is important to coordinate with the insurance adjuster or loss assessor before contracting for any services. If you enter a contract with any cleaning or repair contractors without the insurance company's knowledge or consent, you may be left with bills to pay that otherwise would have been covered by insurance.
- ✔ Do not discard or throw away damaged goods without first consulting your insurance company or before an inventory is made.
- ✔ If you cannot remember the name of your insurance company, or the details are not available, contact the Insurance Council of Australia.

Besides insurance, there are many questions related to taxes, expenses and determining just how you will recover from a personal financial point of view. See back cover for some useful contacts.



Step 4

Leaving your home

If you can't stay in your home

It may be necessary to leave your home because of structural damage or because it is unsafe.

Contact the local police to inform them of your intentions to move to alternative accommodation, and provide them with a contact address or phone number.

If you need to get anything from your property, check with the fire officer in charge that it is safe to enter. If it is safe to do so, it is recommended you take the following items with you:

- Identification – driver's licence, Medicare card, passport
- Insurance contact details and policy
- Credit cards
- Medicines and prescriptions (medication exposed to heat and smoke should be disposed of)
- Personal aids – mobility aids, glasses, hearing aids etc
- Valuables – personal items such as jewellery, photographs, cash, laptops etc
- Legal documents
- Car and house keys
- Mobile phone and charger.

Handy hints

- ✓ If you are an existing or new Centrelink customer receiving a social security or pension benefit, you may be entitled to a "crisis payment". Contact Centrelink to have your claim assessed.
- ✓ If you are receiving a Veterans' Affairs pension or benefit, contact your Veterans' Affairs office as you may be entitled to a "crisis payment".

Where to stay?

If you can't remain in your property, staying with family, friends or neighbours until more permanent arrangements can be made is the best option.


Some insurance policies may also cover the cost of temporary accommodation.



Checklist

Notify the following people of any relocation or new address and contact details

Handy hint

-  You may wish to write down the name of the person you spoke to and the date for future reference.

Your employer

Family and friends

Your children's schools

Post Office – to hold or forward your mail

Delivery services – such as newspapers

Utility companies – such as Telstra, Aurora and the local council

Police – if the fire is under investigation

Insurance company



Step 5

Salvage hints



If your home has not been completely destroyed, you may be able to salvage some items that are affected by heat, smoke or water but are otherwise intact. Here are some hints to help you restore them.

Clothing

Smoke odour and soot can sometimes be washed from clothing.

The following formula often works for clothing that can be bleached:

4 – 6 tbsp of washing powder, 1 cup of household chlorine bleach, 4 litres of warm water. Mix well, add clothes, rinse with clear water and dry well.

To remove fresh mildew, wash with soap and warm water, then rinse and dry in sun.

Flooring and rugs

When water gets underneath linoleum, it can cause odours and warp the wood floor. If this happens, remove the entire sheet. If the linoleum is brittle, a heat lamp will soften it so it can be rolled up without breaking. If carefully removed, it can be re-cemented after the floor has been completely dried.

Allow rugs and carpets to dry thoroughly. Dry them as quickly as possible by laying them flat and exposing them to a circulation of warm air. Using a fan on the rugs will speed up the process. Make sure they are thoroughly dry, as even surfaces that appear dry may still have moisture remaining at the base of the tufts and this can quickly rot a rug.

Handy hints

- ✓ Salvaging property should be undertaken only after consultation with your insurance company.
- ✓ For information on cleaning and preserving carpets, call your carpet dealer, installer or qualified carpet cleaning professional.

Mattresses and pillows

Your mattress may be able to be rejuvenated by a company that builds and repairs mattresses. If you must use your mattress temporarily, put it in the sun to dry then cover it with rubber or plastic sheeting. It is almost impossible to get the smoke smell out of feather pillows or foam.

Food

If your home freezer has stopped running, you can still save the frozen food. Keep the freezer closed as it has enough insulation to keep food cold for at least one day. Alternatively, move your food to a neighbour's freezer or wrap the frozen food in newspaper and blankets or use an esky. Do not re-freeze food that has thawed.

With non-perishable food, wash cans and jars in detergent and water, marking food contents on the can or jar with permanent marker if labels come off. Do not use cans that are rusted, dented or have bulged.

Leather and books

Wipe leather goods with a damp cloth then a dry cloth. Stuff handbags and shoes with newspaper to retain shape. Leave suitcases open. Dry wet leather goods away from heat and sun. Rinse leather or suede jackets in cold water and dry them away from heat and sun. You can use steel wool or a suede brush on suede leather.

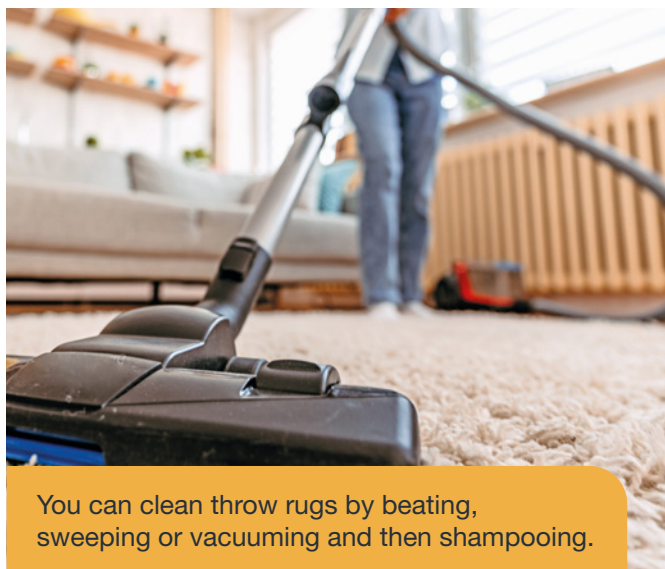
Dry wet books as soon as possible. The best method to save wet books is to freeze them in a vacuum freezer. This will remove the moisture without damaging the pages. If there is a delay in locating a vacuum freezer, place them in a normal freezer until one can be found.

Power and electrical appliances

If the Tasmania Fire Service turned off your gas or power during the fire, call your electric or gas company to restore these services – do not attempt this yourself. Do not use appliances, particularly electrical appliances, that have been exposed to water until you have an authorised service technician check them.



Clean cooking utensils by washing with soapy water, rinse and then polish with a fine powdered cleaner.



You can clean throw rugs by beating, sweeping or vacuuming and then shampooing.



Step 5

Salvage hints



Washable wallpaper can be washed like an ordinary wall, but take care not to soak the paper.

Walls

To remove soot and smoke from walls, furniture and floors, wear rubber gloves and apply the following mix:

*4 – 6 tbsp of washing powder,
1 cup of household chlorine bleach,
4 litres of warm water.*

Rinse with clear warm water and dry thoroughly.

Wash one small area at a time, then rinse the wall with clean water immediately. Do not repaint until the walls and ceilings are completely dry.

Wallpaper can also be repaired. Use a commercial paste to re-paste loose edges or sections.

Locks and hinges

Locks should be taken apart, wiped with kerosene and oiled. If locks cannot be removed, squirt machine oil through a bolt opening or keyhole and work the knob to distribute the oil. Hinges should also be thoroughly cleaned and oiled.

Furniture

- You can rub wood surfaces with a fine steel wood pad dipped in liquid polishing wax, wiping with a soft cloth then buffing. Remove any drawers and let them dry thoroughly.
- Wet wood can decay and mould, so remove any mud or dirt by scrubbing with a stiff brush and cleaning solution, then allow it to dry thoroughly.
- If mould forms, wipe the wood with a cloth soaked in a solution of borax dissolved in hot water.
- To remove white spots or film, rub the wood surface with a cloth soaked in a solution of a cup of household ammonia and ½ cup of water. Wipe dry and polish with wax.
- Do not dry your furniture directly in the sun. The wood will warp and twist out of shape.

Handy hints

- ✓ Consider contacting a professional cleaning services company in order to salvage your furniture.
- ✓ Contact your wallpaper dealer or installer for information on wallpaper cleaners.

Let the air in. You're going to be using various cleaning products that will likely produce toxic vapours. Make sure the work area is fully ventilated.



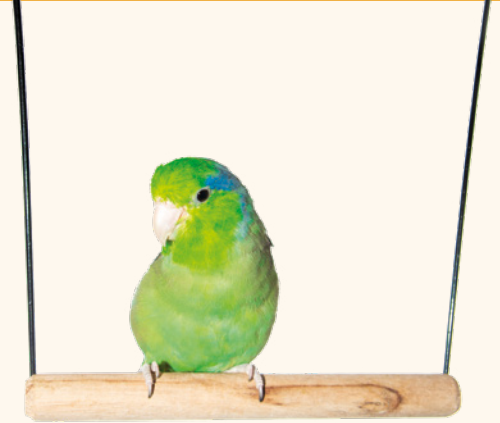
Step 6

Caring for pets



A house fire will be a traumatic time for pets. It is important to comfort them by speaking calmly and spending time with them. Doing so can help you in your recovery too.

Pets may react in different ways by displaying different behaviours. A scared animal may react by biting or scratching. Regular care and attention will be required to help them calm down. If you are not able to care for your pets immediately after a fire, ask a friend or family member for help. If this is not an option, there are boarding facilities available.



Handy hints

- ✔ Use toys, a blanket or favourite human's clean clothing to comfort pets.
- ✔ Make sure pets are fed their usual diet, and have plenty of water.



Your wellbeing

Care and recovery

Traumatic experiences such as a house fire are sudden and overwhelming. In some cases, there are no outwardly visible signs of physical injury, but there can still be a serious emotional toll.

It is normal and very common for people who have experienced traumatic situations to have very strong emotional reactions such as depression, anxiety, sadness, anger, fatigue, nightmares and difficulty concentrating. These are common responses.

Children as well as adults can suffer from stress following a fire. Understanding normal responses to these abnormal events can help you cope with your feelings, thoughts and behaviours, and help you along the path to recovery.

Normal reactions to a stressful event

Mental reactions

- Trouble thinking clearly, planning and making decisions
- Can't concentrate or remember details
- Can't stop thinking about the fire
- Thinking about other bad things that have happened in the past
- Trouble speaking clearly

Physical reactions

- Tension, stress and tightness in muscles
- Feeling weak or tired, loss of energy
- Headaches, shaking, sweating, upset stomach or aches and pains
- Loss of appetite, cravings for sugar, alcohol, coffee or cigarettes
- Feeling tired but can't sleep, disturbed sleep or bad dreams
- Emotional reactions
- Feeling numb, detached or disconnected
- Irritable, bad-tempered or impatient, unable to relax
- Feeling overwhelmed or hopeless
- Sadness and grief, crying easily
- Feelings are easily hurt, overly sensitive to what others say, feeling misunderstood
- Anger or blaming others
- Fear and anxiety, easily startled
- Feeling differently about the people close to you

Handy hints

- ✓ Recognise that you have been through an extremely stressful event.
- ✓ Do one thing you enjoy every day.
- ✓ Avoid becoming isolated.

You should consider seeking professional help if you continue to experience strong reactions more than two weeks after the fire.



Looking after yourself

- Give yourself permission to feel bad, and find positive ways to cope
- Be more careful than usual
- Following a traumatic event you are more vulnerable to illness and injury
- Take care of yourself by getting plenty of rest; eat regular, healthy meals
- Avoid using alcohol or drugs to cope, stimulants such as tea, coffee, cola, chocolate and cigarettes will make the feeling of being “hyped up” worse
- Make time to relax
- Keep a routine going by trying to include exercise, work and relaxation in your schedule every day
- Try to resume normal activities as soon as possible (but don't overdo it)
- Avoid making major life decisions too quickly. Focus on making daily decisions to start feeling in control of your life again
- Spend time with people you care about

Getting support

Most people will recover over time with the support of family and friends. However, sometimes distressing events can be difficult to overcome, and professional help may be useful. Seeking help is not a sign of weakness – it is another strategy to help you recover from the fire.

You should consider seeking professional help if you:

- Feel very distressed, frightened, irritable or jumpy a lot of the time
- Are unable to carry out your normal roles at work, school or with your family
- Feel hopeless, despairing and think you can't go on
- Are thinking of harming yourself or someone else.

Where to get help

Your GP is a good place to start. They can also refer you to other service providers who can help.

Lifeline (13 11 14) provides confidential 24-hour counselling, support and referral.

Useful contacts

Ambulance Services	For emergencies telephone Triple Zero '000'
Anglicare Tasmania	FREECALL 1800 243 232 FREECALL 1800 800 588 24 hour service Emergency Accommodation Assistance www.anglicare-tas.org.au
Australian Red Cross	FREECALL 1800 246 850 www.redcross.org.au
Catholiccare	6278 1660 (Hobart) 6332 0600 (Launceston) 6431 8555 (Burnie) 6423 6100 (Devonport) www.catholiccaretas.org.au
Services Australia	13 24 68 www.servicesaustralia.gov.au
Colony 47 Inc	FREECALL 1800 265 669 6222 1530 6214 1311 www.colony47.com.au e-mail: admin@colony47.com.au
Housing Connect	1800 800 588 housing@colony47.com.au
Hobart City Mission	6215 4251 (Moonah) 6215 4200 (Hobart) www.hobartcitymission.org.au
Homes Tasmania	1300 665 663 Monday to Friday 8.30 am to 5.00 pm
Lifeline	For 24/7 crisis support and suicide prevention 13 11 14 www.lifeline.org.au
Salvation Army	13 72 58
Service Tasmania	1300 135 513 www.service.tas.gov.au
Tasmania Fire Service (Fire Safety Information)	1800 000 699 fire.tas.gov.au



www.fire.tas.gov.au



Also available:

A Visual Guide
to Home Fire Safety

Home Fire
Safety



For further information:

fire.tas.gov.au
tfseducation.com.au
Free-call **1800 000 699**



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