

Returning home after a bushfire

After a bushfire, returning to your property can be an emotional and challenging experience. Take time to assess any damage, wear protective clothing, and avoid touching or disturbing anything that appears unsafe.

Returning home after a bushfire requires patience and care to ensure your safety and well-being.

Protective clothing

Put on protective clothing before returning to your property:

- Sturdy footwear and heavy-duty gloves.
- Overalls with long sleeves and trousers (preferably disposable).
- Special face masks (called 'P2'). Ordinary paper dust masks, handkerchiefs and bandanas do not filter out fine ash, dusts or asbestos fibres.

Be alert to all hazards

If you have a septic tank, it may have weakened - **do not** drive or walk over it.

Minimise disturbance of dust and ash, which may contain hazardous materials. Do not spread ash around, moisten it with water to minimise dust.

Be alert for hazardous materials such as LPG cylinders, chemicals (garden/farm), cleaning products, medicines, and other burnt residues.

If you are using portable generators, make sure they are in a well-ventilated area to avoid the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.

There may be overhead hazards such as falling trees and tree limbs, and live power lines. Avoid overhead hazards.

Cleaning up your property

Wear adequate protective clothing when handling debris outside.

You do not need to arrange for the cleanup of your property. Specialist contractors are being engaged to assess properties for hazardous materials.

When that is complete, contractors will arrange with you to demolish any dangerous structures and remove rubbish and debris from your property. This will be at no cost to you.

Asbestos

Exposure to asbestos fibres is only likely to occur when people actively disturb ashes on properties built with asbestos-cement sheeting (buildings built before 1990).

If asbestos is likely to be present, do not disturb it. The cleanup will be coordinated by the Tasmanian Government.

Ash from treated timber

CCA-treated wood is commonly used in decking, fencing, and landscaping. After a fire, the ash from this wood contains copper, chromium, and arsenic. This ash can be harmful; keep children and pets away.

Rainwater tanks

The risk to human health is low from contaminated rainwater tanks in bushfire-affected areas. However, if fire-fighting foams have entered your tank, do not drink the water and do not give it to pets to drink.

If your rainwater tank is intact and the water has no abnormal look, smells or taste, it should be safe to use. It is safest to boil untreated water that you plan to drink. If the rainwater looks, smells or tastes unusual, assume it is contaminated and do not drink it or use it for cooking, or preparing food.

Check your roof and guttering for ash, debris and animal carcasses. Remove them as soon as possible to avoid contaminants getting flushed into your tank.

If your rainwater has been contaminated, drain the tank and allow it to refill with clean rainwater or fill it with water from a registered water carter.

Food safety

Do not eat perishable food, such as meat, poultry, fish and leftovers if it has been above 5°C for 4 hours or more.

Frozen food that has thawed can be refrozen if it still contains ice crystals and is below 5°C.

Smoke and your health

Smoke may still be present in your area following a bushfire and may last for up to two weeks if there is no wind to clear the air.

Smoke and soot in the home

Open all doors and windows to ventilate your home to help remove any smoke odour. Hard surfaces (furniture, walls and floors) can be washed with mild soap or detergent and water. Soft furniture and bedding can be aired outside.

Clothing

Clothes that smell of smoke and clothes that had been left on the clothesline should be washed normally and dried outside. Rewashing of clothes ensures sensitive skin is protected from soot, particles and ash.

Air pollution

High smoke levels may cause breathing problems and worsen existing health conditions throughout the body.

Those most at risk are infants or young children, people aged 65 years and older, pregnant women, people with diabetes, heart or lung diseases, including asthma. These people should avoid unnecessary travel to affected areas.

What you should do

Understand your risk and manage your health

- Understand whether you, or those you care for, are at higher risk.
- For people at lower risk, you may get symptoms such as burning eyes, a sore throat, runny nose or a cough from breathing smoky air for short periods. These should clear up quickly once the smoke goes, if they don't then seek medical care.
- If you, or those you care for, are at higher risk, it is important to manage health and reduce the smoke you/they breathe.
- If it's smoky, and you have a health condition such as asthma, you should actively manage your symptoms and minimise the time spent in smoky conditions.
- Follow your asthma action plan, or your health plan for managing other health conditions.
- If you don't have an action plan, contact your GP. If you need advice after-hours call Healthdirect on 1800 022 222 or [know your treatment options](#).
- If symptoms worsen, go to your nearest hospital emergency department.
- In a medical emergency, call 000 for an ambulance.

Private Power Pole

- If you have a private power pole that has been damaged by the bushfire, you are responsible for the repair and reinstatement of the power pole.
- If you are unsure about the ownership of poles and power infrastructure on your property, you can call TasNetworks call centre on 132 004, who may be able to assist with more information.
- For information on power line electrical contractors, please visit the Consumer, Building and Occupational Services website (<https://www.cbos.tas.gov.au/topics/technical-regulation/electrical-standard-safety/poles/powerline-contractors>)

For more information

For current smoke alerts visit the [TasALERT website](#).

Find out more about [bushfire smoke and air quality](#).

Contact Public Health Services for further advice phone [1800 671 738](tel:1800671738), email public.health@health.tas.gov.au

For general information call the Tasmania Emergency Information Service (TEIS) on 1800 667 483.