The Houston Fire Department presents

AFTER THE FIRE

courage, commitment, compassion

after the fire is out, we continue to serve

A fire can be one of the most tragic events in your life. Often when a fire strikes, the hardest part is knowing where to begin the recovery process of your home.

We have gathered the following information to assist you in this time of need. We want to help reduce your fire losses. If you cannot find the help you need, call the Houston Fire Department at 713-247-5000 and we will make every effort to assist you in locating the appropriate individual or agency who can help.

The Houston Fire Department is a professional organization continually seeking opportunities to serve our community through fire prevention, emergency operations, patient care and excellent customer service. We are committed to be a superior emergency service organization that continually improves the quality of service delivered to our customers, the citizens of Houston.

It is our privilege to serve you,
The Houston Fire Department

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protecting yourself

We know you are anxious to inspect the damage and, if possible, begin salvaging your belongings. Our primary responsibility is to protect you from possible injury and to provide for your safety. So please be aware of the unseen hazards present such as structural damage, damaged utilities, toxic hazards or airborne contaminants.

Babies and small children, the elderly, pregnant women, individuals with respiratory diseases (asthma, emphysema etc.) may be especially sensitive to contaminants and/or sooty deposits which may be present after the fire.

Exposure to toxic gases produced in fires as well as certain particles, such as asbestos fibers used in some building materials, have been shown to increase the risk of certain types of cancer.

In most cases, it is both safer and quicker to let your insurance agency handle the necessary cleanup and renovation of your property. They can schedule the needed repairs with skilled professionals who are specialists in fire and water damage repairs. These professionals know the possible hazards and have the equipment necessary to deal with them.

DO NOT NEEDLESSLY EXPOSE YOURSELF OR YOUR FAMILY TO A POSSIBLE HAZARD!

the first 24 hours

After the fire is out, certain firefighting and rescue techniques may appear unnecessary. However, lives could be lost and buildings could suffer total destruction without these methods. Since fires produce temperatures over 1200 degrees Fahrenheit, ventilation of the building is necessary to eliminate heat, smoke and hot gases. This must be done quickly so firefighters can enter the structure to extinguish the fire and rescue any occupants. Walls are also forced open to search for hidden fires which must be done to ensure complete fire extinguishment.

- Contact your insurance agent as soon as possible. Your agent will be able to help you arrange for immediate repairs. If you cannot reach your agent or have no insurance, you may wish to obtain professional assistance. Fire and water damage restoration firms are listed in the yellow pages.

- After Fire Department personnel leave, the building becomes your responsibility. If possible, the firefighters may secure doors and windows against unauthorized entry. The final responsibility does, however, lie with the owner.

- If you are a tenant however, contact the resident manager, the owner or the owner's insurance agent. It is the owner's responsibility to prevent further loss to the building.

insured

If your home is insured, give notice of the damage immediately. You can do this by contacting your insurance agent. Once in contact with your agent, ask them to meet you immediately at the site of your fire and if possible, arrange a meeting with a claims adjuster as well. Ask your agent to bring a copy of your policy and be sure to confirm in detail the content of your policy coverage.

Some insurance companies may require the policyholder to make an inventory of damaged personal property showing, in detail, the quantity, description and how much was paid for the items.

Another important item on your to-do list is to file a claim in writing with your insurance company. This must be done within 60 to 90 days of the fire. Check with your insurance company regarding any deadlines.

This general statement should include the date, time and cause of the loss. Other important items that are helpful to include in this general statement are the names and addresses of anyone who has a legal interest in your property such as mortgage/lienholders and completed inventory as specified by your insurance company.

After your claim is approved, your insurance company may pay in several ways. Once you have submitted your formal statement of loss, the insurance company generally has up to 60 days to pay the claim. Depending on your coverage, some portions of your payment may be delayed.

not insured?

If you do not have fire insurance, recovering from your losses will depend on your own resources and help from your community. These organizations keep up to date on current services available and can put you in touch with service agencies in your community. Here is where you can look for help:

- Your church or synagogue
- Local service organizations like the Lions Club or Rotary Club
- Relief organizations like the American Red Cross or Salvation Army
- Local and state governments which have emergency service offices or social services

Your fire looses are deductible from you federal income tax. Remember to save all of your receipts and keep records of what you spend to repair and replace your fire-damaged property and any costs incurred from living expenses while you are recovering from the fire. These records should be used for calculating your casualty loss on your income tax form.

If your loss is uncompensated by insurance, you may be entitled to a tax deduction. Federal guidelines are available in Publication 547, Tax Information on Disasters, Casualty Losses and Theft. Contact the I.R.S. at (800)829-1040.

re-establishing utilities

After the building inspection is completed, a permit must be obtained prior to making repairs. The Houston Fire Department often will have the utility services shut off or disconnected as a safety precaution to prevent further damage to the structure and its contents.

The procedures for re-establishing the utility services are as follows:

- **Electricity**- Contact a professional, licensed electrician. Approval from a certified electrician is required before the utility companies can reconnect the power.
- **Water**- You can turn this back on yourself. Use caution because the the fire may have damaged the plumbing. Water damage may occur when the pipes are again filled with water. Contact Utility Customer Service at (713)837-0600 for more information.
- **Natural Gas**- Do not turn the gas back on. a Reliant Energy/Entex service person is available to turn the gas on and relight your appliances. Call (713)659-2111 to reach a Reliant Energy/Entex representative.
- **Telephone**- Contact your telephone company business office.

Note: Remember not to operate wet or damp appliances. Have a service person check them first.

ELECTRICITY AND WATER DO NOT MIX!

if you cannot live in the house

If your home is severely damaged or contaminated, we recommend caution in planning to reoccupy the residence.

If the building is structurally damaged to the point that is uninhabitable, a building inspector must be called. After the building inspection has been completed, a permit must be obtained before making repairs. If you are covered by a homeowner's insurance policy, you may be eligible for alternative temporary housing. Check your policy or with your agent.

Remember, save all receipts for any expenses incurred during fire loss. Your insurance company will want copies to reimburse you. These receipts will also be useful for verifying losses claimed on your federal income tax. All items in the home should be inventoried and no item should be thrown away without the approval of the insurance company.

Those individuals who have experienced fire or other disaster may obtain assistance from the local American Red Cross.

After applying to the Red Cross, you can obtain food, clothing, lodging and other services. A Red Cross disaster caseworker will assist you day or night. Your disaster caseworker can help contact the appropriate agencies.

property & income tax adjustments

Information and applications can be obtained from the Harris County Tax Assessor's Office by calling (713)224-1919. Ask for the Taxpayer's Claim for Reduction of Assessments on Destroyed Property. Return completed forms to the Assessor's Office. Be sure to meet the appropriate deadlines.

Uninsured loss of property, both real and personal, may entitle you to deductions on your income tax. Information is available from the area office of the Internal Revenue Service. Call (800)829-1040.

You will encounter different viewpoints on the value of your property in adjusting your fire loss or in claiming a casualty loss on your federal income tax. Knowing the following terms will help you understand the process used to determine the value of your fire loss:

Your Personal Valuation: Your personal loss of goods through fire may be difficult to measure. These personal items have sentimental value to you, however, objective measures of value are what you, the insurer, and the I.R.S. will use as a common ground for discussion.

Cost When Purchased: This is an important element in establishing an item's final value. Receipts will help verify the cost price.

Fair Market Value Before the Fire: This concept is also expressed as "actual cash value". This is what you could have received for the item if you sold it the day before the fire. The price would reflect its cost at purchase minus the wear it had sustained since purchase. Depreciation is the formal term used to express the amount of value an item loses over a period of time.

Value After the Fire: This is sometimes called the item's "salvage value".

gathering important documents

Documents important to your well-being may be damaged or destroyed as a result of a fire. Locating these documents will speed up the process of recovering from a fire. Below is a list of documents that should be located if possible:

- Animal Registration
- Automobile Title
- Bank Books
- Birth Certificates
- Burial Contracts
- Citizenship Papers
- Credit Cards
- Death Certificates
- Divorce Decree
- Driver's License
- Income Tax Records
- Insurance Policies
- Marriage Papers
- Medical Records
- Medicare/Medicaid
- Passports
- Payment Books
- Senior Citizen ID Cards
- Social Security Cards
- Stock and Bonds
- Title to Deeds
- Warranties
- Wills

change of address

If you move, don't forget to notify the following agencies:

Banks
Department of Public Safety (driver's license)
Your Children's School
Credit Card Companies
Doctor's Office and your pharmacy
Phone Company
Publications (newspapers, magazines, etc.)
Utility Customer Service
Social Security Administration (if necessary)
U.S. Postal Service

caring for damaged documents

Important documents may be salvaged if you quick-freeze them immediately. Lift off each page as they thaw and copy. Contact any of the meat cutting firms located in the yellow pages and look for quick-freeze services.
Public assistance clients should notify the Department of Human Services office in their area if their ID card is damaged or destroyed. This will help eliminate problems if the need arises for check cashing, medical aid, or food assistance programs. Call (888)456-2770.

replacing damaged money

To reclaim paper money or coins, check with any local commercial bank or contact the following. Be sure to include name(s) and address(es) on bonds, appropriate date or time period when purchased, denominations and appropriate number of each.

Savings Bonds

US Treasury Department
Bureau of Public Debt
Divisions of Loan & Currency
537 South Clark Street
Chicago, Il 60600
Attn: Bond Consultant

Paper Money

Currency Redemption Division
Treasury Department
Washington, DC 20220

Coins

Superintendent, US Assay Office
32 Old Slip
New York, NY 10005

cleaning tips

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

Walls, Floors & Furniture- To remove soot and smoke from walls, furniture and floors, mix together 4-6 tbsp. of tri-sodium phosphate, 1 cup of Lysol or other chloride bleach and 1 gallon of warm water. Wear gloves when cleaning. After washing article, rinse with clear warm water and dry thoroughly.

Walls may be washed down while wet. Use mild soap or detergent. Wash a small area at one time, working from the floor up. Then rinse the wall with clear water immediately. Ceiling should be washed last. Do not repaint until walls and ceilings are completely dry.

Your wallpaper can also be repaired. Use a commercial paste to repaste loose edges or sections. Contact wallpaper dealers or installers for more information on wallpaper cleaners. Washable wallpaper can be washed like an ordinary wall, but care must be taken not to soak the paper. Work from the bottom to top to prevent streaking.

Wood Furniture- Do not dry your furniture in direct sunlight. The wood will warp and twist out of shape. Clear off mud and dirt. Remove drawers. Let them dry thoroughly so there will be no sticking when you replace them. Scrub wood furniture or fixtures with a stiff brush and a cleaning solution. Wet wood can decay and mold, so dry completely. Open doors and windows for good ventilation. Turn on your furnace or air conditioner if necessary. If mold forms wipe the wood surface with a cloth soaked in a mixture of borax and hot water. To remove white spots or film, rub the wood surface with a cloth soaked in a solution of 1/2 cup of household ammonia and 1/2 cup of water. Then wipe the surface dry and polish with wax.

Wall-To-Wall Carpet and Rugs- A wet/dry vacuum or water extractor carpet cleaning machine is excellent for removing standing water and dirt. These can be rented at most supermarkets or drugstores. Add carpet cleaning detergent and clean the carpet as instructed on the machine. Allow the carpet to dry out thoroughly before sweeping or vacuuming.

Rugs should also be allowed to dry thoroughly. Throw rugs can be cleaned by beating, sweeping or vacuuming and then shampooing. Rugs should be dried as quickly as possible- lay them flat and expose them to a circulation of warm, dry air. A fan turned on the rugs will speed drying. Make sure the rugs are dry. Even though the surface seems dry, moisture remaining at the base of the tufts can quickly rot a rug. For information on cleaning and preserving carpets, contact any of the carpet cleaning firms listed in the yellow pages of your telephone book.

cleaning tips

Combating Smoke Odors- Removing smoke odors can be very difficult because of the many combinations of materials on the market. Some examples are raw materials such as natural fibers (i.e. cotton, linen, silk, wool, fur fiber, etc.) and man-made fibers (acetate, acrylic, nylon, rayon, polyester, vinyls, etc.) For best results, check the yellow pages for a local cleaning firm.

Clothing with Soot- Clothing that can withstand bleaching can often be cleaned by washing in one of the following mixture:
Add 4 tablespoons of tri-sodium phosphate and 1 cup of Lysol to 1 gallon of water. Wash, then rinse with clear water and let dry thoroughly. You could also use 1/2 cup of ammonia to 2 gallons of water or finally you may try rinsing the clothing in vinegar (use rubber gloves).
Always read the care label for proper instructions before cleaning any garments. It is wise to contact a professional cleaning service if you have doubts or questions.

Leather & Suede Items- Wipe with a damp cloth, then with a dry cloth. Stuff your purses, shoes, etc. with paper to retain shape. Leave suitcases open to air out. Leather should be dry and kept away from the heat and sun.
Steel wool or a suede brush can be used on suede. We recommend that you contact leather and suede cleaners for more information. See yellow pages under "Leather".

Dishes, Pots & Pans- Wash dishes in very hot, soapy water. Rinse in hot water. Dishwashers are excellent for cleaning dishes due to the water's high temperature.
Most dishes can be soaked in a solution of 1 tablespoon of ordinary household bleach to 1 gallon of lukewarm water for 30 minutes prior to washing.
Pots and pan can be sterilized by boiling in water for at least 10 minutes. CAUTION: Some parts (handles, knobs, etc.) of the pots and pans will not withstand the high temperature involved with boiling water. Remove where practical.

Refrigerators & Freezers- Sometimes odors are very difficult to remove due to the dampness of the insulation, which absorbs the odors. Here are some recommendations: After one of the alternatives has been used, let the appliance air dry. Caution: Be cautious with small children when cleaning or discarding a refrigerator or freezer. Make sure the doors are removed or secured against accidental closing.

1. Defrost and wash all surfaces with water and dishwashing detergent; rinse with 2 tablespoons of baking soda per 1 quart of water; re-rinse with clear water.
2. Wash a solution of 1 cup of vinegar to 1 gallon of water.
3. Wash with a solution of 1 cup of household ammonia

safe food practices

What to do When the Freezer Stops- A full freezer will stay cold many hours longer than a freezer that is only a quarter full. A freezer full of meat will not warm up as quickly as a freezer full of baked goods. The colder the food, the longer it will stay frozen. A well-insulated freezer will remain frozen longer than one with little insulation.
If dry ice is placed in the freezer soon after the power is shut off, the temperature will stay below freezing. Look in the yellow pages of the telephone book under "ice" or "dry ice".
The entire contents of the freezer should be moved to a commercial freezer firm or a friend's freezer.

food management

Partial thawing and refreezing will reduce the quality of foods particularly fruits, vegetables and prepared foods. It is considered a safe practice to re-freeze foods that have partially thawed if the foods still contain visible ice crystals. Do not eat ice cream or ice milk after the product has melted.

Meat products are unsafe to eat when they begin to spoil. If the color or odor of the thawed product is questionable, discard it. Bacteria multiply very rapidly in thawed or non-refrigerated foods designed for controlled conditions.

Fruits usually ferment as they begin to spoil and generally will absorb smoke or other by-products of fire, leaving the fruit bitter to the taste and often discolored. It is generally wise to dispose of such food.

Foods stored in glass jars subjected to heat may crack. If this occurs, discard immediately.

Do not used canned foods if the can has bulged, dented or rusted. To disinfect the exterior of a tin can or jar, wash the container in a solution of 3 tablespoons of household bleach to 1 gallon of water. Discard medicines and cosmetics if contamination is suspected.

Remember: **IF IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!**

american red cross

People across the greater Houston community know they can rely on the American Red Cross in times of crisis. Our pledge to the American public is that "We'll Be There".

When a fire occurs in your home, volunteers from the Greater Houston Area Red Cross are notified, generally by the fire department. Carefully trained to assist families in distress, these volunteers are there to take care of your emergency needs.

Every case is different because the needs of each fire victim are different. Initially, volunteers conduct a careful assessment of the victim's emergency needs. What is the condition of the home? Where can the victim stay? Did the family lose bedding, clothes, food or other essential household items?

Volunteers determine whether the house or apartment is inhabitable, or if there is a relative/friend with whom the victim can stay. If not, The Red Cross provide temporary shelter.

If needed, the Red Cross will provide vouchers to replace food, clothing and prescription medicines. Other emergency need are evaluated. Vouchers are provided to replace the goods lost to the fire. The voucher, issued to the store of your choice, gives the person, who has suffered a loss, a means of healing and taking control of rebuilding their lives.

All Red Cross disaster assistance is free, given as a gift from the people who support the American Red Cross. No re-payment is asked or expected.

For more information or to contact the Greater Houston Area Red Cross call (713) 526-8300. At night call (713) 526-0636

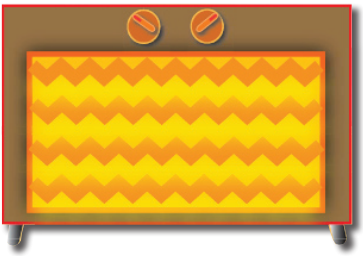
American
Red Cross

electrical safety rules

To Help Prevent Electrical Fires- Check appliance cords for frays, broken plugs or damaged wires. Don't overload electrical outlets. If you have an older home, make sure the wiring system can handle today's increased electrical loads. Consult an electrician if needed. Select and use portable space heaters carefully.

Key Things To Remember- Select a heater that has been approved by a nationally recognized testing laboratory. Read the manufacturer's instructions completely before using. Avoid using extension cords with the heater. Unplug the heater before going to sleep and when not in use.

In Case of Emergency- If smoke comes from an outlet, shut off the power at the circuit breaker or fuse box and call the fire department. If an appliance catches fire, unplug it immediately if possible. Never throw water on an electrical fire- you could be electrocuted. Electrical fire must be extinguished with a non-conductive agent such as dry chemicals, carbon dioxide (CO_2), halogen or household baking soda. Extinguishers for electrical fires will be labeled or coded "C".



natural gas safety rules

To Help Prevent Accidents- Follow manufacturer's instructions with all appliances. Have your appliances installed, serviced, repaired by qualified professionals. Appliances should also be inspected annually by certified professionals. Keep chimney flues and vents for appliances clean and in good condition. Keep areas around your gas water heater and furnace clean and keep flammables away from them. Teach family members what to do is they smell gas.

In Case of Emergency- If you smell gas, go to a neighbor's house and call Reliant Energy Entex at (713)659-2111. Do Not use a telephone, switch a light on or off, use a flashlight or light a match if you smell gas.

how did we do?

NAME

HOME PHONE WORK PHONE

ADDRESS CITY STATE ZIP

If your answer is no to any of the following questions, please explain under comments	Yes	No
Was your call handled in a professional and courteous manner?	☐	☐
Did you receive assistance at the location of the emergency in a timely manner?	☐	☐
Did the personnel responding act in a professional and courteous manner?	☐	☐

TYPE OF EMERGENCY: ☐ Medical ☐ Fire

LOCATION OF EMERGENCY:

DATE OF EMERGENCY: ___/___/___ TIME: ☐am ☐pm INCIDENT #:

COMMENTS:

When you are finished with this survey, please mail a copy to:

City Of Houston Fire Department,

PIO

1205 Dart Street

Houston, Texas 77007

Keep a copy of this survey for your records.

reference directory

Emergency (Fire, Ambulance, Police).....911

General City Information (non-emergency).....311

Houston Fire General Information.....713-247-5000

Arson.....713-865-9000

Houston Police Information.....713-884-3131

American Red Cross (day).....713-526-8300

American Red Cross (night).....713-526-6036

Mayor's Citizen's Assistance.....713-247-2907

Centerpoint Entex (Gas).....713-659-2111

Centerpoint Energy.....713-659-2111

Harris County Tax Assessor.....713-368-2000

Department of Public Works & Engineering (water & sewer).....713-837-0050

Poison Control.....800-222-1222

U.S. Post Office.....800-275-8777

I.R.S. Publications.....800-829-1040

Texas Department of Human Services (TDHS).....800-582-5233

checklist for the first 24 hours

Date of Fire: _____/_____/_____ Incident Number: _____

Investigator/Capt. _____

- ☐ Contact Greater Houston Area American Red Cross
- ☐ If insured, contact insurance company immediately
- ☐ Make sure residence is safe to enter; if not, secure temporary housing
- ☐ Gather essential items such as food, medication, clothing and eyeglasses
- ☐ Contact Houston Police to let them know that the site will be unoccupied
- ☐ Retain receipts from expenses incurred due to fire
- ☐ Locate any necessary forms of identification, important documents and devices (i.e. Social Security card, driver's license, insurance information, prescriptions, hearing aids or other prosthetic devices)
- ☐ Contact mortgage company, employer, children's school, post office and any delivery services

The Houston Fire Department

1205 Dart Street • Houston, Texas 77007 • 713-247-5000

Information source:
Federal Emergency Management Agency