

AFTER THE FIRE



WE CONTINUE TO SERVE

Sunnyvale Department of Public Safety
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 3

Insured / Uninsured Property 4

If You Must Stay Elsewhere 5

Vehicle Fires 6

General Information 7

Cleaning Tips 9

Reference Directory 11

Notes & Information 12

INTRODUCTION

THE SUNNYVALE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

The Sunnyvale Department of Public Safety is one of several fully integrated public safety departments in California. All police officers and firefighters are cross-trained, and switch between the two assignments. The Department has six fire stations and one headquarters building, with approximately 295 personnel.

This handout was developed as a resource tool to give you information you might need in the coming days to assist you in reducing your losses after the fire is out. In the event that you cannot find the help you need, contact your assigned investigator or phone (408) 730-7212 and we will assist you in locating the appropriate individual or agency that can help you.

FIRE DEPARTMENT PROCEDURES

When a fire is reported, it might feel like 15 or 20 minutes have gone by before the Fire Department arrives. In actuality, it was probably only a few minutes. If you have questions regarding any of the Department's tactics, please feel free to contact your assigned investigator (if applicable) at (408) 730-7212, or Fire Administration at (408) 730-7160.

You might ask why we break windows and doors, or put holes in your roof. Fire produces temperatures well over 1200° F, along with smoke and hot gases. At times, it is necessary to eliminate heat, smoke and hot gases before firefighters can enter to extinguish the fire. Ventilation must be accomplished quickly to help reduce the spread of the fire and minimize smoke damage.

Often, walls must be forcibly opened to check for "hidden" fires, allowing for complete extinguishment of the fire. After the fire is out, the damage might appear unnecessary; however, without the use of these firefighting techniques, complete fire suppression would be extremely difficult.

For vehicle fires, fire crews occasionally have to force entry to check fire extension and extinguish the fire. To ensure that the fire is completely extinguished, it might be necessary for fire crews to:

- cut and/or disconnect the battery cables to prevent electrical shorting of wires where insulation of wiring has been damaged;
- completely remove padding from seats, especially where cotton padding is used;
- force entry into the passenger or engine compartments or trunk of the vehicle to extinguish the fire, check for extension and gain access to battery cables

INSURED / UNINSURED PROPERTY

IF YOU ARE INSURED

Contact your insurance company or agent as soon as possible! If you are renting or leasing the property, you must also contact the owner. Your insurance adjuster might be able to assist you in making immediate repairs or help in securing your home. If you are unable to contact your agent and need professional assistance in boarding up your home, you can contact a general contractor or a fire damage restoration firm (refer to the yellow pages of your phone directory under *Contractors-General* or *Fire & Water Damage Restoration*).

To obtain a copy of a fire report, contact the Sunnyvale Department of Public Safety, Records Unit, at (408) 730-7100. Your insurance agent can handle this for you.

IF YOU ARE UNINSURED

If your property is not insured, or if your insurance will not cover all of your losses, contact your family lawyer or the Internal Revenue Service for directions. You might be eligible for casualty loss. Check publication 547 (Tax Information on Disasters, Casualty Losses and Thefts) available at your local Internal Revenue Service Office or on the internet at <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p547.pdf> (Adobe Acrobat needed).

If you are not insured and need assistance, the American Red Cross is available to assist families who have been displaced from their homes in a disaster. They are available around the clock every day of the year with food, clothing and housing. Sunnyvale Community Services might also be able to assist (refer to the directory at the end of this handout).

IF YOU MUST STAY ELSEWHERE

GETTING YOUR FAMILY SETTLED

If your home is unlivable and you cannot find a place to stay with family or friends, consult with your insurance company to see if you are covered for additional living expenses. The Red Cross might be able to provide temporary shelter until you can arrange to rent a place to stay.

TAKE YOUR VALUABLES WITH YOU

If you must leave your home, try to locate the following items to take with you: important legal documents, identification, vital medicines, eye glasses, hearing aids, valuables, credit cards, checkbooks, insurance policies, money, jewelry, photos, etc. (Note: Let safes cool down before opening). ***IT MIGHT BE UNSAFE TO RE-ENTER YOUR RESIDENCE – CONTACT YOUR ASSIGNED INVESTIGATOR PRIOR TO ENTRY.***

UTILITIES

The Fire Department might have the utility services shut off or disconnected as a safety precaution or to prevent further damage to the structure and its contents. The utility companies cannot restore your utilities until the repairs are approved, and a clearance has been issued by the Building Department (refer to telephone directory in back of pamphlet).

IF YOU MOVE

If you move, notify the post office, banks, water company, credit card companies, etc. of your new address. Also contact the Social Security Administration if you are receiving benefits (refer to the back of this pamphlet).

VEHICLE FIRES

IF INSURED

Contact your insurance agent, who can explain coverage and will assist you with your claim. If your vehicle is damaged in a structure fire, contact both your home insurance and vehicle insurance agents.

IF UNINSURED

If your vehicle can be repaired, a list of repair facilities can be obtained in the yellow pages of your phone directory, under *Automobile Repairing and Service*. If towing is required, refer to the yellow pages of your phone directory, under *Automobile Road Service*. If the vehicle is a total loss (beyond repair), consider contacting a salvage yard. A list of vehicle salvage companies can be obtained in the yellow pages of your phone directory, under *Automobile Salvage*.

GENERAL INFORMATION

EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

If you need emergency assistance for food, clothing or lodging, contact the local American Red Cross, Salvation Army or Sunnyvale Community Services.

PETS

Smoke can damage the lungs of a dog or cat in minutes and sparks can cause painful burns that might stay hidden under the pet's fur. As soon as possible, take your pet to a veterinarian. If your pet is lost in the confusion, call Sunnyvale Animal Control and the Santa Clara Valley Humane Society.

COUNSELING SUPPORT

After a fire, you might experience anxious feelings, depression, difficulty concentrating, sadness, anger, fatigue, irrational (unfounded) fears and nightmares. These are common responses to a traumatic event. If you or your family members need support, call the American Red Cross or check the yellow pages of your phone directory under *Counseling Services*.

WHAT ABOUT CASH OR NEGOTIABLES?

If burned, handle with extreme care. Attempt to encase each bill or portion of a bill in plastic in order to salvage as much as possible. Take everything to your local bank for advice regarding replacement.

WHAT ABOUT PERISHABLES?

Any food, beverages and/or medicines exposed to heat or smoke should **NOT** be consumed. Medicines, especially, can change strength by exposure to heat. Please check with your doctor first before taking these medicines. If food was tightly closed in sealed containers, or in airtight refrigerators or freezers, they might be salvageable. It is wiser to replace the item rather than jeopardize your health by taking a chance. **IF IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!**

GENERAL INFORMATION – cont'd

WHAT ABOUT ODORS?

After a fire, residual smoke odor can linger. Short of a good cleaning of everything in the house, you can place small saucers of household vanilla, wine, vinegar or activated charcoal around your home to help absorb odors. Remember that the smoke odor is also inside the heating and cooling ductwork, and you get a fresh blast of it each time your system is turned on.

If insured, consult your insurance company for assistance. If the odor doesn't go away in about a week, you should call a cleaning service that specializes in the restoration of fire-damaged property (refer to the yellow pages of your phone directory under Fire and Water Damage Restoration). They have equipment to scrub out the ductwork and deodorize everything in the house.

CLEANING TIPS

If your property is insured, your insurance company will assist with arrangements for a cleaning service. If your property is not insured, here are some hints you might want to consider:

- Seal off the room you are working in with plastic wrap to keep soot from moving from to another location.
- Keep windows closed if at all possible.
- Vacuum all surfaces.
- Change and clean air conditioner/heater filters.
- Other surfaces that might require attention:

Painted walls – To remove soot and smoke from walls, mix together 4 to 6 tablespoons tri-sodium phosphate (can be purchased at paint stores) and 1 gallon of water. ***WARNING – KEEP MIXTURE AWAY FROM CHILDREN & PETS!*** Wash a small area at a time working from the floor up, and do the ceilings last. Rinse thoroughly. Do not repaint until completely dry. It is advisable to use a smoke sealer (available at paint stores) before painting.

Wallpapered walls – Wallpaper cannot usually be restored. Check with your wallpaper dealer.

Furniture – Do not use chemicals on furniture. A very inexpensive product called Flax Soap (available in most paint and hardware stores) is a most efficient product to use on wood, including kitchen cabinets. Do not dry furniture in the sun as the wood will warp and twist out of shape.

Floors – Use Flax Soap on wood and linoleum floors. It will take 4 or 5 applications. Then strip and re-wax.

Carpeting – Steam clean, shampoo, and repeat steam cleaning.

Mattresses – Reconditioning a mattress at home is very difficult, if not impossible. Your mattresses can be renovated by a company that builds or repairs mattresses. If you must use your mattress temporarily, put it out in the sun to dry – then cover it with plastic sheeting. It is almost impossible to get smoke odors out of pillows, as feather and foam retain odors.

CLEANING TIPS – cont'd

Locks and 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 or keyhole and work the knob to distribute the oil. Hinges should be thoroughly cleaned and oiled. **WARNING – DO NOT USE GASOLINE FOR CLEANING!**

Mildew – To remove mildew, wash stain with soap and water. Rinse well and dry. If stain remains, use lemon juice and salt, or a solution of household chlorine bleach and warm water.

Clothes – To remove smoke odors or soot from clothes that can be bleached, add ½ cup of ammonia to 2 gallons of water; then rinse in vinegar (use rubber gloves). Should you have any questions about the cleaning and preparation of clothing, it is wise to contact a cleaning service. **WARNING – DO NOT MIX AMMONIA WITH BLEACH!**

Electrical Appliances – Do not run wet appliances until you have them checked out by a service person.

Cooking Utensils – Your pots, pans, flatware, etc. should be washed with soapy water, rinsed and then polished with a fine powdered cleaner.

REFERENCE DIRECTORY

DISASTER RELIEF

American Red Cross	(408) 577-1000
Salvation Army	(408) 282-1165
Sunnyvale Community Services	(408) 738-4321

SUPPORT COUNSELING

The Center for Living with Dying	(408) 980-9801
Fairoaks Mental Health	(408) 733-2760

DOCUMENT REPLACEMENT

Santa Clara County Recorder's Office	(408) 299-2481
Veterans Administration – Regional	(800) 827-1000
Social Services Agency	(408) 271-5500
Social Security Administration	(800) 772-1213
Department of Motor Vehicles	(408) 277-1301

ANIMALS

Sunnyvale Animal Control	(408) 730-7178
Humane Society of Santa Clara Valley	(408) 727-3383

MISC.

Pacific Gas and Electric	(800) 743-5000
Sunnyvale Community Development (Building Dept. & One-Stop Permit Center)	(408) 730-7444

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