

# Items to Consider After a Wildfire

*By Anne-Marie Coy on 17 May, 2013*

Concerned about what you should do after a wildfire? Here are a few things to consider. Is my home safe? Is my yard safe? Is my food safe? Is my well water and septic system safe?

Here is a quick checklist and further resources to determine what steps you should take after a fire.

## Items to consider after a Wildfire:

### Is my home safe?

- If you remained at home, check the roof immediately after the fire danger has passed. Put out any roof fires, sparks or embers. Check the attic for hidden burning sparks.
- For several hours after the fire, maintain a "fire watch." Re-check for smoke and sparks throughout the house.
- If you have evacuated, do not enter your home until fire officials say it is safe.
- If a building inspector has placed a color-coded sign on the home, do not enter it until you get more information, advice and instructions about what the sign means and whether it is safe to enter your home.
- If you must leave your home because a building inspector says the building is unsafe, ask someone you trust to watch the property during your absence.
- Use caution when entering burned areas as hazards may still exist, including hot spots, which can flare up without warning.
- If you detect heat or smoke when entering a damaged building, evacuate immediately.
- If you have a safe or strong box, do not try to open it. It can hold intense heat for several hours. If the door is opened before the box has cooled, the contents could burst into flames.

### Is my yard safe?

- Watch for ash pits and mark them for safety—warn family and neighbors to keep clear of the pits also.
- Watch animals closely and keep them under your direct control. Hidden embers and hot spots could burn your pets' paws or hooves.
- Follow public health guidance on safe cleanup of fire ash and safe use of masks.
- Wet debris down to minimize breathing dust particles.
- Wear leather gloves and heavy soled shoes to protect hands and feet.
- Cleaning products, paint, batteries and damaged fuel containers need to be disposed of properly to avoid risk.

### Is my food safe?

- Discard any food that has been exposed to heat, smoke or soot.
- Swollen cans or food products that may have absorbed smoke (rice, flour, sugar etc.) should be discarded immediately.
- Refrigerated food should be discarded if the power has been out for more than 4 hours or if there is any evidence of smoke contamination in the refrigerator.

- Frozen foods that are still frozen should be safe as long as they are packaged to prevent smoke contamination.

## Is my well water and septic system safe?

- Do NOT use water that you think may be contaminated to wash dishes, brush teeth, prepare food, wash hands, make ice or make baby formula.
- Keep adequate bottled water on hand for cooking and drinking until certain that well water is safe.
- Fire damage to above and underground structures can lead to well water contamination and malfunction of wastewater (septic) systems.
- Well owners need to inspect and test their well and septic system following impact by wildfire.
- Damage to electrical wires, controls, pipes, tanks, and other components of these systems may affect system performance and may compromise the safety of your water supply, or affect the proper disposal of wastewater. If the outside of your home or yard area near your well is burned, you should have a licensed well company inspect the system.

## Need more information?

Our checklist was compiled from the following resources – Please follow the links for more information.

General information on home safety and wildfires:

<http://www.ready.gov/wildfires>; <http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/wildfires/>

Information on Well and Septic system

safety: [http://www.gallatin.mt.gov/Public\\_Documents/GallatinCoMT\\_WQDFactSheets/YourWellandSepticSystem-AfteraWildfire.pdf](http://www.gallatin.mt.gov/Public_Documents/GallatinCoMT_WQDFactSheets/YourWellandSepticSystem-AfteraWildfire.pdf); [http://www.extension.colostate.edu/sanmiguel/natresources/natresources\\_docs/UseofWellsSepticSystemsFollowingWildfire.pdf](http://www.extension.colostate.edu/sanmiguel/natresources/natresources_docs/UseofWellsSepticSystemsFollowingWildfire.pdf)

Information on food safety:

[http://www.fsis.usda.gov/factsheets/Fires\\_and\\_Food\\_Safety/](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/factsheets/Fires_and_Food_Safety/)