

MEDICINE HAT FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

A GUIDE TO FIRE RECOVERY





As guardians of our city and surrounding areas, Medicine Hat Fire & Emergency Services is committed to caring for our community. It is at the heart of everything we do.

Recovering from a fire takes time, and it's normal to need support along the way – but you will get through this, and you will rebuild. Our goal is to make your transition back to everyday life as smooth and manageable as possible.

This booklet will guide you step-by-step through the tasks you may need to complete to get back on your feet. Please take the time to carefully read the information provided. If you have any questions or concerns, please call 403-529-8282 or email fireprevention@medicinehat.ca.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chad Eakins".

Chad Eakins
Fire Chief and Director
Medicine Hat Fire & Emergency Services

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STEP ONE

FIRST THINGS FIRST

- ❑ **If you are insured**, contact your agent, broker, or insurance company as soon as possible. You are responsible for providing immediate notice of the loss. Most policies cover the cost of shelter, food and clothing for the reasonable time needed to repair or rebuild the residence up to policy limits. *See next page for other questions to ask your insurance adjuster.*

- ❑ **If you are not insured**, there may be private organizations that can offer assistance, including:
 - Canadian Red Cross - Provides short-term emergency support for up to 72 hours following the incident. This immediate assistance is meant to cover basic needs while you arrange longer-term support through insurance or other resources.
 - Local religious organizations
 - Provincial or municipal emergency social services
 - Non-profit crisis centers (ie. Elks Canada)

- ❑ **Secure the property and protect yourself from further losses** - It is your responsibility to make sure the house is secured against further damage. If you rent, the landlord or property manager should do this. If you own the home, here's what do:
 - Board up broken windows and doors
 - Cover holes in the roof and walls
 - In the winter, drain the water lines if the house won't be heated for a while

You can do these things yourself or call a contractor. If you are insured, your policy may pay any reasonable expenses incurred in preserving insured property.

- ☐ **Remove valuables and essential items** – You may only enter your home if Medicine Hat Fire & Emergency Services says it's safe to do so.

Try to retrieve the following items:

- Important legal documents
- Identification
- Vital medicines
- Eyeglasses and hearing aids
- Credit cards
- Cheque books and cheques
- Insurance policies
- Money, stocks, jewelry, photos, sentimental items

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR INSURANCE

1. When will you be on-site?
2. When will the contractor be on-site?
3. What do I do about food in my refrigerator and/or freezer?
4. For emergency housing, do we pay and keep receipts or does insurance pay up front?
5. What do I do if I have no access to immediate cash or credit cards?
6. What happens to my pets? Do I have to take them with me or can they be placed in a kennel?
7. Who will secure the site?
8. Who is allowed to have access to the site?
9. Do I have access?
10. What about my valuables?
11. How long do you estimate repairs will take?
12. What is available for additional living expenses?

STEP TWO

IF YOU CANNOT LIVE IN THE HOME

- **If your residence has suffered structural damage,** Medicine Hat Fire & Emergency Services will notify the City's Planning and Development Department, and an inspection will be conducted. Any damaged building must comply with the current building code regulations. Before starting any repairs or reconstruction, consult with Planning and Development to determine whether a permit is required.

If you have to move, even temporarily, be sure to give your new address to:

- Canada Post
 - City of Medicine Hat utilities department - (403) 529-8111
 - Banks and credit card companies
 - Family and friends
 - Schools
 - Your employer
- **Get your family settled** - If your home is unlivable and you're unable to stay with family or friends, you will need to arrange temporary housing. Try to keep the family together – especially during difficult times, staying together offers important emotional support. And remember to take care of yourself, too.
 - **Take care of your pets** - If your pet is lost, contact the SPCA or local animal shelter right away. Pets may be injured or stressed after a fire, so it's important to have them checked by a veterinarian as soon as possible.

- ❑ **Utilities** – Often utility services will be shut off as a safety precaution, and to prevent further damage to the structure. The City will not restore your utility service until the appropriate repairs have been inspected and approved by the planning and development personnel. planning and development personnel.

STEP THREE

RE-ENTERING THE HOME

Hours, days, or even weeks after the incident you may be allowed to go back into the home to retrieve possessions or take stock of damage. BE SAFE!

- ❑ **Make sure you have permission to go in** – Check with Fire & Emergency Services or the local building inspector. You may not re-enter your home if it has been deemed unsafe. If a fire investigation is underway, you must get permission from the Fire Investigator before going inside. It's also a good idea to bring a relative or friend with you for support.
- ❑ **Equipment needed to re-enter** – If you are allowed to re-enter, take the following items with you:
 - Flashlight
 - Dust mask and gloves
 - Hard soled shoes
 - Camera, phone or video recorder
 - Garbage bags
 - Tools

Move carefully around the house, damage caused by the event may have made things unstable. Open closets and cupboards carefully. Be cautious of soft floors or walls and any protruding nails.

STEP FOUR

REPLACING DOCUMENTS AND MONEY

Items	Where to Replace	Missing or Destroyed	Saved
Birth, Marriage, Death Certificates	Medicine Hat Licence Centre	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Drivers License and Registration	Medicine Hat Licence Centre	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Insurance Policies	Insurance Agent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Citizenship Papers	Immigration Canada 1-888-242-2100	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Passports	Passport Office 1-800-567-6868	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Income Tax Records	Revenue Canada 1-800-959-8271	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wills	Your Lawyer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Medical Records	Your Family Doctor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Medical Insurance Card	Medical Insurance Card	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social Insurance Cards	Employment Insurance 1-800-206-7218	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pension Plan Papers	Employment Insurance 1-800-206-7218	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Employment Insurance Records	Employment Insurance 1-800-206-7218	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Children's Services	Your Case Worker	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Land Titles	Medicine Hat Licence Centre	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Titles to Deeds	Medicine Hat Licence Centre	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Divorce Papers	Court of Queens Bench 403-297-7535	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Animal Registration Papers	Animal Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Damaged paper money (coins are not accepted) should be carefully packaged to prevent further damage. It can be evaluated and replaced in two ways:

1. Complete a **claim form** at <https://www.bankofcanada.ca/banknotes/bank-note-redemption-service/> and then send the packaged notes by regular or registered mail, or by courier, to:

Bank of Canada
Bank Note Redemption Service
234 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0G9

2.You can take the damaged notes to a chartered bank and have them sent through the Regional Distribution Centres (RDCs) - (*nominal fees may apply*).

PERSONAL NOTES



STEP FIVE

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY

You've been through a difficult experience, and it's normal not to simply "take it in stride." You may feel helpless, confused, angry, or worried. Even if you want to stay strong for your family, you will eventually need to process the emotional impact of what has happened.

Recovery can take time and may feel frustrating. You and your family might experience disagreements or find it hard to communicate. Lack of sleep and difficulty concentrating can affect your work. You may also feel tired, depressed, disorganized, or irritable. That's why it's so important to take care of yourself during this time.

- Get plenty of rest – sleep as much as your body needs in the first few days.
- Eat regular, nutritious meals to help support your physical and emotional recovery.
- When you can, take breaks and spend time doing things you enjoy.
- Try to stay active – even light physical activity can help relieve stress.
- Accept help from others with gratitude; remember, you would do the same for them.
- If you continue to feel overwhelmed, can't move past feelings of despair, or notice signs of stress (see below), reach out for help. Talk to your family doctor, a counselor, local clergy, or a community support organization. Some of these organizations are listed in the "Assistance Directory" of this booklet.

Warning signs of stress include: short temper, frequent arguments, difficulty sleeping, bad dreams, apathy, loss of concentration, increased consumption of alcohol, getting upset over minor irritations, aches, pains, stomach problems, and smoking more than usual.

- **Take care of your children** – It's important to be sensitive to your children's reactions. They may become clingy or fearful, complain of aches and pains, have nightmares, or revert to behaviors like thumb-sucking or bed-wetting. They might fight with siblings or withdraw and try to act brave to please you – even when they really need comfort and reassurance.

SUGGESTIONS FOR YOUR CHILDREN

- Encourage your children to talk. Listen carefully and avoid dismissing their fears. Let them know it's okay to feel scared, and reassure them that you will get through this together. Spend extra time with them and offer plenty of comfort and physical affection.
- Provide factual information. Explain what happened in an honest but age-appropriate way. When they're ready, talk about fire safety and what they can do to help keep the family safe in the future. For fire prevention information, contact Medicine Hat Fire & Emergency Services at (403) 529-8282, email fireprevention@medicinehat.ca, or visit www.medicinehat.ca/fire.
- Maintain routines. Try to keep their daily activities and environment as normal as possible to provide a sense of stability.
- Coordinate with others. Work with teachers, babysitters, and anyone else involved in your children's care so they understand how your children may be affected.

- **Pets are important members of your family too!** Pets can suffer the same way people do. If you notice strange behaviour, be careful and maintain a safe distance from the animal. In any case, consider taking them to the vet as soon as possible following the incident for a check-up. Try and maintain your pet's normal environment and routine as much as possible.

STEP SIX

FOOD AND MEDICINE

REMEMBER, "IF IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!"

Heat, smoke, toxic fumes, and dirty water can make food and medicine unsafe to consume. All perishable foods, items packaged in cardboard or plastic, and any food or medicine exposed to heat, smoke, fumes, or water should be discarded and replaced.

- ❑ **Refrigerated food** – Refrigerators normally keep food at around 4°C (40°F). If the temperature inside rose above this level, discard all food. When in doubt about heat exposure, throw it out.
- ❑ **Frozen food** – Frozen food may be safe unless the freezer was exposed to intense heat. If you are unsure, discard it. If the freezer has stopped working, keep the door closed – it can keep food frozen for at least one day. As soon as possible, consider:
 - Moving food to another working freezer (wrap items in newspapers and blankets, and use insulated containers).
 - Using dry ice in your freezer, which can keep food frozen for 2 to 4 days.

You can safely refreeze food that still has visible ice crystals. However, partial thawing and refreezing can reduce food quality. Discard any food that has completely thawed, has reached a temperature above 4°C, or has an unusual color or odor.

☐ **Canned food** –

- **Glass Jars** – Discard all food in glass jars that were involved in a fire. The heat may have broken the seal, making the contents unsafe.
- **Tin Cans** – If cans are visibly damaged or exposed to intense heat, discard them as well. If a can is bulging, badly dented, or rusted, throw it out. If cans are intact and have not been exposed to intense heat, you can safely clean them. Wash the outside using a solution of 45 mL (3 tablespoons) of household bleach mixed with 4 litres (1 gallon) of water. If labels come off during cleaning, mark the contents clearly with a felt pen or grease pencil.

- ☐ **Medicines** – Before taking any prescription or over-the-counter medicines that may have been damaged, check with your doctor or pharmacist. Ask them how to safely dispose of any medications that can no longer be used.



STEP SEVEN

CLEANING YOUR HOME AFTER THE EMERGENCY

☐ **Tips & cautions before you begin -**

- If you are insured, contact your insurance agent first. Your home policy may cover the services of a property restoration specialist, which can save you time, effort, and money.
- As you sort through your possessions, set aside any ruined furniture, appliances, books, and other items for insurance purposes. You may want to temporarily store these in a garage, basement, or shed.
- If possible, consult a restoration specialist to help determine what can be saved and what should be discarded.

☐ **Salvaging your belongings on your own -**

- You will likely need extra space to clean and store items; consider borrowing or renting space if needed.
- Some cleaning solutions can be hazardous. Always follow the safety instructions on the label, and never use them around children, pets, or open flames. Use rubber gloves and goggles for added protection.
- Never mix ammonia with bleach or any other cleaning product.
- Make sure you have adequate ventilation; if not, consider cleaning items outdoors.
- Keep cleaning cloths saturated with solutions in a metal container with a tight-fitting lid.
- When cleaning a specific room, seal it off with plastic sheeting to prevent soot from spreading to other parts of your home.

- Smoke, odours, soot, and stains can linger and may require multiple cleanings.
- Small dishes of vinegar, vanilla, or activated charcoal placed around the house will help to absorb odours. Commercial products are also available. If odors persist, contact a local professional by searching online for “Fire and Water Damage Restoration.”

□ **Cleaning Tips -**

- **Appliances** - Do not operate electrical appliances that are wet or damaged until they have been inspected by a professional technician.
- **Books and documents** - Dry books and documents by standing them upright with pages separated. Aim a fan at them to aid drying. If they are very damp, sprinkle corn starch or talcum powder between the pages and leave them to dry. Brush the powder off once dry. After drying, stack and press the books to help prevent wrinkling.
- **Clothing** - Soot- and smoke-stained clothing may be difficult to clean completely.

For colour-fast clothes, try soaking them in a solution of 125 ml (½ cup) household ammonia and 4 litres (1 gallon) of water to remove smoke odours and soot. Then rinse in a separate solution of vinegar and water. You may need to repeat this process.

For minor burn marks, rub a cut onion on the scorched area and soak the item in cold water.

Garments made of wool, silk, or rayon should be taken to a dry cleaner as soon as possible.

Consult a professional cleaning service for further advice.

STEP SEVEN

CLEANING YOUR HOME AFTER THE EMERGENCY CONTINUED...

- **Cooking utensils (pots, pans, and flatware)** - Clean with hot, soapy water, then polish with a powdered cleanser and rinse. Copper and brass can be cleaned using specialty polishes or by rubbing them with salt on a lemon or a vinegar-soaked cloth sprinkled with salt.
- **Furnace ducts** - Have ducts cleaned by a professional furnace-cleaning service. Replace furnace filters frequently in the weeks following the incident.
- **Furniture and wood** - Avoid harsh chemicals. Start by removing dirt and debris. Take out drawers and allow them to dry thoroughly to avoid warping. Clean wooden surfaces with a stiff brush and a wood-safe cleaning solution. Dry thoroughly—do not dry in direct sunlight, as this may cause warping or discoloration.

If mold is present, clean the surface with a boric acid and hot water solution (follow package instructions).

To remove water spots or smoke film, wipe the surface with a cloth soaked in a solution of 125 ml (½ cup) ammonia and 125 ml (½ cup) water. Dry and polish with furniture wax.

The cleaning of antiques and fine reproductions should be referred to a professional.

To remove odours from inside furniture, soak a slice of bread in vinegar and place inside the item for about 12 hours.

- **Hazardous materials** – Dispose of any hazardous materials that have been exposed to heat, moisture, or smoke. Take care when handling any chemicals. Wear rubber gloves, goggles, and protective clothing to ensure your safety. Always follow the warning labels on packages.

In Medicine Hat, residents can drop off household hazardous waste at the City's Waste Management Facility (landfill). Call (403) 527-1718 or visit medicinehat.ca for more information.

- **Leather Goods** – Wipe items with a clean, damp cloth and dry with a dry cloth. Stuff purses and shoes with newspaper to help them retain their shape. Leave suitcases open to dry. Once dry, clean with saddle soap.

Leather and suede jackets can be rinsed with cold water and dried away from heat and sunlight. Use steel wool or a suede brush on suede items.

- **Locks and hinges** – Iron locks and hinges should be taken apart, cleaned with kerosene, and then oiled. If your locks cannot be removed, squirt machine oil through the bolt opening or keyhole and work the mechanism to distribute the oil thoroughly.
- **Mattresses and pillows** – These should usually be discarded, as it is nearly impossible to remove smoke or moisture odours completely.

If you must use a mattress temporarily, allow it to dry in the sun and then cover it with plastic sheeting before use.

- **Refrigerators and freezers** – Clean using a solution of baking soda and water or a mixture of 250 ml (1 cup) of vinegar or household ammonia to 4 litres of water. Place an open box of baking soda inside to absorb lingering odours.

STEP SEVEN

CLEANING YOUR HOME AFTER THE EMERGENCY CONTINUED...

- **Refrigerators and freezers continued...**

To remove mildew, wash stains with soap and water, rinse well, and dry in the sun. If the stain persists, soak the item (if bleachable) in a solution of 125 ml (½ cup) household chlorine bleach and 3 litres (¾ gallon) of warm water. Alternatively, sprinkle salt on the stain and squeeze lemon juice over it.

Consult a professional cleaning service for further advice.

- **Rugs and carpets** - Dry rugs and carpets as quickly as possible.

Lay throw rugs flat in a warm, dry area. Aim a fan at the rugs to speed up the drying process. Ensure the rugs are completely dry—any remaining moisture in the tufts can lead to rot. Once dry, clean the rugs by beating, sweeping, vacuuming, and shampooing with a commercial rug shampoo.

Wall-to-wall carpets can be cleaned with a wet/dry vacuum or a commercial steam-cleaning machine to remove water and dirt. If necessary, use a commercial dryer to remove any remaining moisture from underneath. Afterwards, steam clean and shampoo as needed. Adding a mixture of one part vinegar to two parts water in the cleaning machine can help reduce odours.

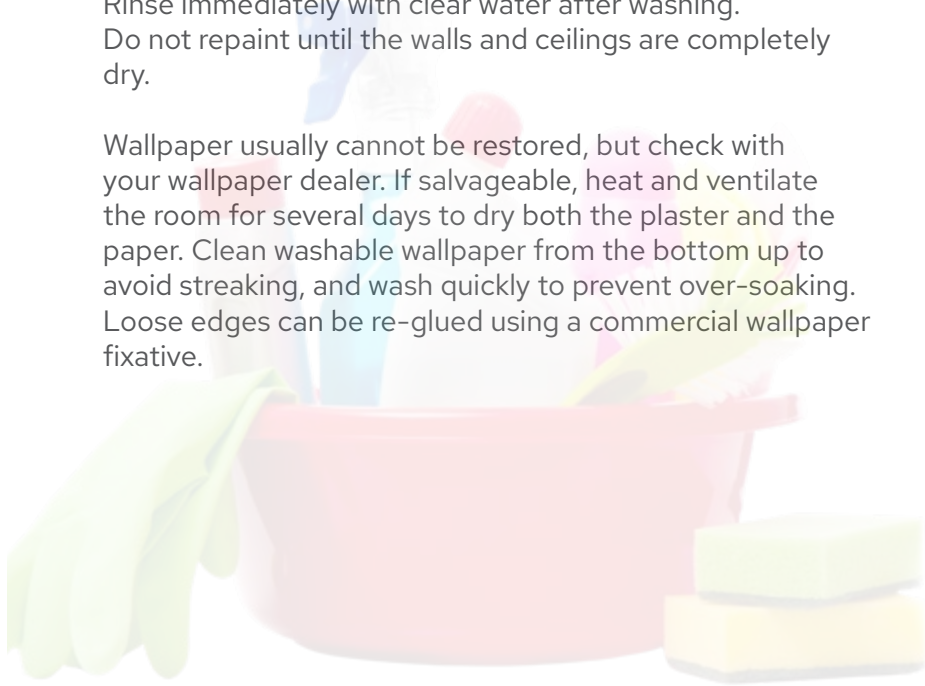
- **Subfloors** – If water has penetrated the surfaces beneath your flooring, it can cause warping and lingering odours. If seepage has occurred, remove tiles, hardwood planks, linoleum, or other coverings. A flooring dealer can recommend a solvent to loosen any remaining adhesive. Allow the subfloor to dry thoroughly before replacing flooring materials.

Clean using a high-quality floor cleaner. Several applications may be required to fully remove soot and restore the finish.

- **Walls or wallpaper** – Clean walls with a solution of 60–90 ml (4–6 tbsp) of tri-sodium phosphate (TSP), available at paint or hardware stores, or 250 ml (1 cup) of chlorine bleach, or a disinfecting cleanser such as Lysol mixed with 4 litres (1 gallon) of water.

Wash a small area at a time, working from the floor upward, leaving the sootiest areas—usually the ceiling—for last. Rinse immediately with clear water after washing. Do not repaint until the walls and ceilings are completely dry.

Wallpaper usually cannot be restored, but check with your wallpaper dealer. If salvageable, heat and ventilate the room for several days to dry both the plaster and the paper. Clean washable wallpaper from the bottom up to avoid streaking, and wash quickly to prevent over-soaking. Loose edges can be re-glued using a commercial wallpaper fixative.



ASSISTANCE DIRECTORY

FIRE DEPARTMENT

Emergencies	9-1-1
Fire Administration	(403) 529-8282
Home Safety Inspections	(403) 529-8282

POLICE

Emergencies	9-1-1
Bylaw Non-emergencies	(403) 529-8481
Victim Assistance Supervisor	(403) 581-1054

CITY OF MEDICINE HAT

General Information	(403) 529-8100
Animal Pound Services	(403) 487-5671
Gas Utility	(403) 529-8190
Planning and Development Services	(403) 529-8374
Media (News) Inquiries	media@medicinehat.ca
Medicine Hat SPCA	(403) 526-7722
Water and Sewer	(403) 529-8176

EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE AGENCIES

Canadian Red Cross*	1 (888) 800-6493
Elks of Canada	(306) 359-9010
Provincial Distress Crisis Line	1 (800) 784-2433
The Root Cellar (Food Bank)	(403) 528-4313

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

Canada Child Tax Benefits	1 (800) 387-1193
Employment Insurance Inquiries	1 (800) 206-7218
Income Security Programs	
(Canada Pensions Plan & Old Age Security)	1 (800) 277-9914
Statistics Canada	1 (800) 263-1136

SCHOOL BOARDS

Medicine Hat Public School Board	(403) 528-6700
Medicine Hat Catholic School Board	(403) 527-2292

*The Canadian Red Cross provides short-term support up to 72 hours after the incident.



PERSONAL CONTACTS

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

PERSONAL NOTES





**PROUD TO PROTECT
MEDICINE HAT AND
SURROUNDING AREA**



CONNECT
WITH US

PHONE

(403) 529-8282

EMAIL

fireprevention@medicinehat.ca

WEB

medicinehat.ca/fire

