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## Food Safety After Wildfires

There are many things to consider when re-opening a food premises (food distribution, public eating establishment or food processor) after an evacuation due to wildfires. The owner/operator of a food premises must clean thoroughly, removed spoiled food, ensure drinking water is available and safe for consumption and ensure that all equipment is operating normally. This fact sheet contains information about cleaning up after a fire/evacuation for owners/operators of a food premises business. Please contact your local public health inspector at the number or email above if you have any questions.

### Food

Make a list of anything you discard, including non-food items; you may also wish to photograph these items. It may be necessary to contact your insurance provider with this information.

Consider the nature of the food product, the type of packaging, the amount of food, the proximity to fire/high heat and the exposure to smoke and soot when deciding to discard or salvage food.

### What should I discard?

- Throw away unwrapped foods exposed to fire/high heat, smoke, water, fire retardants or other chemical agents that are hazardous to human health.
- Throw away food that has any unusual texture, colour or odour.
- Throw away dried goods with damaged packaging or directly exposed to smoke contamination.
- Throw away any damaged, split or bulging cans and jars.
- Throw away soft or leafy fruits and vegetables that have been exposed to smoke, high heat or temperature abuse.
- Dried goods with damaged packaging or directly exposed to smoke contamination should not be salvaged.
- Throw away foods that are past their expiry dates.
- Throw away any food that has been in the “Temperature Danger Zone” (above 4°C and below 60°C) for four hours or longer.
- Food that is wrapped in plastic may not be safe if it’s been exposed to high heat. It may also have been designed to be permeable.
- Foods not stored in original sealed packaging should be discarded such as: bulk foods, candies, flour, cereal products, bakery products, dried beans, rice, nuts and other grains.
- **“When in doubt, throw it out.”**

### What can I save?

- If the power supply to your community has NOT been disrupted, foods stored in working freezers may be salvaged provided that the freezer doors have been tightly closed and temperatures have been maintained at -18°C or below.

- If the power HAS been out, food in the refrigerator and/or freezer may no longer be safe to eat. (Consider the “Temperature Danger Zone”) Foods that have thawed should not be re-frozen.
- Cans and jars that are not damaged and have not been exposed to high heat may be cleaned and wiped down with a sanitizer.
- All food products in commercially sealed, undamaged, unopened, water-proof and airtight packaging may be saved once they are cleaned and sanitized.

## Cleaning

Following an evacuation, food premises owners/operators want to resume operation as soon as possible. It is important that all appropriate steps are taken to protect public health before resuming business operations. Cleaning is, of course, a vital step.

- Throw away all exposed single-service items that have been exposed to smoke.
- Clean and sanitize all areas exposed to smoke and/or high heat: utensils, cookware, dishware, food contact surfaces (including shelves), food preparation equipment, floors, 3-compartment sinks, furniture, etc.
- Recommended cleaning and sanitizing method:
  - Brush visible dirt or soot off when dried
  - Thoroughly wash with soap and water (do NOT add bleach to cleaning solution)
  - Rinse with clean water
  - Sanitize by either immersing or wiping with:
    - 100 mg/L solution of unscented house-hold bleach containing 5.25% sodium hypochlorite or one (1) tablespoon of unscented house-hold bleach per gallon of water), or
    - 200 mg/L of quaternary ammonium solution
    - Hot water of 77°C (170°F) or hotter
  - Air dry
- Avoid initial cleaning with a vacuum; clean floors with a damp mop.
- **WASH YOUR HANDS FREQUENTLY.**

## Water

- Run water from all faucets for at least two minutes each. Remember to put water into floor drains and janitor sinks; p-traps may have dried up.
- Your community may have had a water service disruption and/or depressurization and now be under a Precautionary Drinking Water Advisory (PDWA). Contact our office, the Water Security Agency or check [www.SaskH2O.ca](http://www.SaskH2O.ca) to find out if there is an Advisory or Emergency Boil Water Order issued for your community.
- **Water Vending Machines:** may require cleaning, sanitizing and maintenance before resuming operation. Contact the manufacturer and your local public health inspector for advice.
- Sewers may back-up and immediately drain out again due to fire-fighting operations. When inspecting basements and coolers with floor drains, it is important to check for debris/sewage particles along walls and on low surfaces for the presence of sewage odours.

Other food safety authorities include:

Canadian Food Inspection Agency: [www.inspection.gc.ca](http://www.inspection.gc.ca)

Saskatchewan Health and Healthy Living: [www.saskatchewan.ca/live/health-and-healthy-living/health-topics-awareness-and-prevention](http://www.saskatchewan.ca/live/health-and-healthy-living/health-topics-awareness-and-prevention)