

Tips and Tricks for Assessing Property Damage after Wildfires

Documentation for Insurance

- **Take Detailed Notes and Photos:** Before starting any cleaning or repairs, document the damage thoroughly. Take clear photos and make detailed notes, including the date, location, and nature of the damage. This will be crucial when filing insurance claims.

Structural Damage

Understand When Your Home Was Built

- **Asbestos Warning:** If your home was built before 1985, there is a significant chance it contains asbestos. It's crucial to have an asbestos hygienist test materials like drywall mud and other parts of the home before disturbing them. This will ensure that harmful asbestos particles are not released into the air.

Keeping Dust Particles to a Minimum

- **Avoid Disturbing Damaged Materials:** If parts of your ceiling or walls have collapsed or fallen, do not disturb them. Disturbing these materials could release asbestos particles, which can disperse through the air and cause serious irreversible health risks.

Assessing Exterior Structural Damage

- **Check for Entry Points:** Inspect the outside structure of your home, paying particular attention to broken windows, open windows, and furnace vents. These areas could have allowed smoke to enter your home, potentially causing internal damage or air quality issues.

Check for Water Damage

- **Flooding Risk:** With the power off for weeks, your sump pump may have been inactive, leading to potential flooding in your home. Inspect basements and other low-lying areas for water accumulation due to rain or water used by fire trucks during firefighting efforts.

Inspect the Roof and Gutters

- **Look for Fire and Heat Damage:** Stay off your roof as the heat of the fire and temperature changes could weaken the structure. Instead use ladders or look from a distance.

Contents Damage

Delayed Effects on Clothing

- **Lingering Smoke Smell:** Initially, your clothes may seem unaffected, but over time, the smoke smell can worsen. Repeated washing (4 or 5 times) often doesn't remove the smell completely. Instead, consider using restoration companies equipped with Esporta cleaning machines, which can eliminate 99.9999% of bacteria in a single, less harmful wash, leaving your clothes smoke-smell-free and soft.

What If My Contents Can't Be Restored?

- **Zero-Risk Policy:** Some restoration companies, like DKI Sparklean, offer a zero-risk policy for contents. If they take your affected items (both soft and hard contents) back to their shop and cannot restore them, they will be added to a non-restorable list for your insurance company to review.

Electronics and Appliances

- **Check for Smoke Damage:** Even if electronics and appliances seem to be functioning, smoke and soot can cause internal damage. Consider having them inspected by a professional to ensure they are safe to use.

Furniture and Upholstery

- **Consider Professional Cleaning:** Smoke and soot can deeply penetrate furniture and upholstery. Professional cleaning services have the right tools and chemicals to remove odors and contaminants without damaging the materials.

Vehicle Damage

Inspecting Your Vehicle for Damage

- **Smoke and Soot Residue:** Even if your vehicle appears fine, smoke and soot can still cause damage, particularly to the interior, engine components, and ventilation systems. Inspect your vehicle thoroughly for any signs of residue inside and outside.
- **Air Filters and Engine:** Check your vehicle's air filters and engine for any signs of soot or ash accumulation. These contaminants can hinder engine performance and reduce air quality inside the vehicle.
- **Exterior Damage:** Look for signs of heat exposure, such as blistered paint, melted trim, or rubber seals. These could indicate that your vehicle was exposed to intense heat, which may have weakened some components.

- **Tire Inspection:** The heat from wildfires can affect tire integrity. Inspect your tires for any signs of melting, warping, or other damage that could compromise their safety.
- **Interior Odors:** If your vehicle has a lingering smoke smell, it might require professional cleaning. Similar to household items, vehicles can trap smoke particles in their upholstery, which can be difficult to remove without specialized equipment.