FAQs: Properties Just Outside Burned Areas – Residential Properties

March 14, 2025

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

EVACUATED PROPERTIES WITH NO DAMAGE

Returning and Assessing Your Property

How do I assess my property for smoke damage?
Wear personal protective equipment (PPE) and clothing to protect yourself – including goggles, an N95 or P100 respirator, gloves, long pants, long sleeve shirt, and closed toe shoes.

Walk exterior of home and look for obvious signs of fire and smoke damage. Check for signs of soot and ash buildup on the exterior siding, doors, and windows. Make a note, photograph these areas, and document them for your insurance carrier prior to undertaking any remediation or cleanup.

Walk the entire interior of home and determine the extent of smoke, soot and ash contamination in each room and air vent. Remove from the home to minimize odor problems that could mask smoke odors. If there is a noticeable smoke odor, then you likely have some level of smoke damage. In cases where there is no visible soot or ash, a wipe test, where you wipe a wall or windowsill, confirming no soot or ash, can help determine that there was not significant intrusion of dangerous ash or soot. For situations involving light soot or ash on horizontal surfaces and/or visible airborne particulate and/or noticeable smoke odors, a more thorough cleaning is recommended.

If you notice signs of significant soot, smoke residue, or odors in your home, it's important to assess whether professional cleaning is necessary.

- Do not turn on your HVAC system until the bulk of the soot/ash has been cleaned up. Operating the system prior to removing the bulk of the soot/ash throughout the home will only result in spreading the particulate and re-contaminating surfaces that have already been cleaned.
- If you're filing an insurance claim, they may send a field adjuster to do an assessment and may have firms they would recommend or firms they contract with for this type of work.

Why is 250 yards the stated safe distance for a house to be from burned areas, especially when ash, soot, and fire dust can be blown by winds much further?
The core message of the "Public Health Advisory Noted for Those Residing Near Burned Structures in Palisades and Eaton Areas" is that people living within 250 yards of burned structures with fire debris in the Palisades and Eaton burn areas are at increased risk of exposure to harmful substances, such as ash, soot, and fire debris, before both Phase 1 and Phase 2 debris removal are completed. The closer the proximity to the fire debris the increased likelihood of exposures. Breathing or directly touching these materials could cause

immediate health symptoms and may have long-term health effects. The Public Health Advisory also notes that strong winds and weather fluctuations may increase both the exposure risk and the affected distance. The advisory serves as a warning to these individuals about the potential dangers until hazardous materials and fire debris are properly removed.

Is there guidance to follow when seeking professional help?
The following guidelines are helpful when selecting a professional cleaning or restoration service contractor for smoke, soot, and ash restoration.

First, if you're filing an insurance claim, check with your insurance company to see if they have firms they would recommend or firms they contract with for this type of work. If you end up looking for a professional cleaning contract yourself, confirm that the contractor is properly licensed by the State or County and has the required bonding and liability insurance coverage. Additionally, you can ask the contractor if they work with your insurance company and verify this with your insurance agent.

You may also want to check references, check with the Better Business Bureau, and/or follow up with past customers to ask about their experiences with a particular contractor prior to signing a contract.
It is also essential to request certifications from the contractor, including company and employee certifications from organizations like the Institute of Inspection Cleaning and Restoration Certification (IICRC) and the Restoration Industry Association (RIA).

Before agreeing to start or paying for any work, you should also obtain a detailed, written estimate of the work to be done and the schedule for doing it from the contractor, and do not proceed without one. Make sure to review and understand the terms of the contract and what is required by you, such as payment of your insurance deductible. While indoor testing can be helpful in some circumstances, it is important to know that there are no laboratory tests that can determine if your property is "safe", and all lab results must be evaluated in context with environmental conditions in and around your property. It is best to avoid contractors who fail to provide specific cost and schedule details in the contract.

What tests should I ask for to see if it is safe to return home?
Generally, the risk in your home is determined by the extent of smoke damage, ie. the smoke, soot and ash conditions, inside your home. Cleaning up the smoke damage reduces that risk inside. While indoor testing can be helpful in some circumstances, it is important to know that there are no laboratory tests that can determine if your property is "safe", and all lab results must be evaluated in context with environmental conditions in and around your property.

Health Risks, Cleaning, and Precautions

What determines someone's potential risk of exposure to ash, soot, and fire dust after a wildfire?
Your risk of being exposed to ash, soot, and fire dust after a wildfire depends on a few factors: how close you are to burned structures and the status of fire debris removal for them, which way the wind is blowing, and how much you come into direct contact with the ash, soot, or fire debris. The closer you are to the burned

structures that contain fire debris, the higher the risk. If you're downwind, the wind can carry ash and soot over long distances, increasing the risk of exposure. Additionally, touching or breathing in the ash and soot—whether it's in the air or on surfaces—can raise your risk.

How can I assess my potential risk of exposure to ash, soot, and fire dust?

- **Check your distance from burned structures or parcels and the status of fire debris removal:** Areas in which Phase 1 and 2 fire debris removal has not been completed remain hazardous due to the potential presence of unstable structures, sharp objects in the debris, household hazardous substances, and ash with potentially harmful substances. The closer you are to the burn area, the greater your potential risk of exposure.
- **Watch the wind:** Winds blowing towards your area can carry ash and soot, increasing your risk of exposure.
- **Look for ash or soot:** If you frequently notice ash or soot buildup in your surroundings after cleaning up, it's a sign your potential exposure risk is higher.
- **Monitor air quality:** Poor air quality or visible ash or dust in the air means higher exposure risk to air pollution, which may include fine particles from the fire debris.

How can I reduce the risk of exposure to ash, soot, and fire debris?

Keep an eye on your surroundings for frequent ash or soot buildup on the ground or on surfaces both inside and outside. Be sure to follow the recommended steps for safely handling and cleaning up ash, soot, and fire debris.

Outdoor Cleaning:

a. **Wash Down Outdoor Surfaces.** Regularly and gently hose down driveways, patios, and outdoor furniture with water to remove ash and dust. This keeps it from building up.
b. **Clean Outdoor Items.** Wipe down outdoor furniture, equipment, and toys with a damp cloth to remove any ash or soot that's collected.
c. **Clear Ash from the Yard.** Keep your yard, pathways, and garden areas clean by hosing them down or sweeping carefully with a damp broom to avoid kicking up dust.

Indoor Cleaning:

a. **Wipe Surfaces Often.** Use a damp cloth to clean surfaces like counters, shelves, and furniture. This helps stop ash and soot from building up inside.
b. **Vacuum with a HEPA Filter Regularly.** Use a vacuum with a HEPA filter to clean carpets, rugs, and floors. This helps pick up tiny ash particles and keeps them from floating around.
c. **Change Air Filters.** Change the filters in your HVAC system or air purifiers often, especially if they are using HEPA filters, to trap ash and help keep indoor air clean.
d. **Keep Windows and Doors Closed.** During smoky or dusty conditions, keep windows and doors closed to keep ash from getting inside. When air quality improves, open windows to help clear out the particles.

Soil Maintenance:

a. **Remove Ash and Debris.** Gently rake or remove any large piles of ash and debris from garden beds, lawns, or plant areas. Be careful not to stir up dust into the air.
b. **Add Organic Matter.** Incorporate organic material, like compost or mulch, into the soil to help restore nutrients that may have been lost due to the fire. This can improve soil structure and enhance plant growth.
c. Mulch the Soil. Add a layer of organic mulch (like wood chips or straw) on top of the soil to help retain moisture, reduce soil erosion, and regulate temperature.
d. Monitor Soil Health. Keep an eye on the soil's condition over time. Consider Continue to water and add organic materials as needed to maintain healthy soil for plant growth.

What are the health risks associated with smoke, soot, and ash, and how can I protect myself?
Smoke damage can cause significant physical damage as well as health issues, even if the home is not destroyed or burned by fire. Smoke, soot (fine, black powdery substance that forms when things burn), and ash contain fine particles and toxic substances that can lead to a range of health impacts, including skin and lung irritation, shortness of breath, worsen conditions like asthma, potential exposure to carcinogens, and other short-term and long-term medical conditions. They may also include harmful chemicals such as dioxins, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), and heavy metals. Protect yourself by wearing a properly fitted N95 mask, goggles, gloves, closed toes shoes, and long sleeves and pants. Avoid disturbing ash unnecessarily and ensure good ventilation when cleaning indoor spaces. Wash your hands, clothes, and any exposed skin thoroughly after cleanup.

Individuals, such as children, the elderly, pregnant individuals, or those with respiratory conditions, should take extra precautions or avoid reentering the home until it has been cleaned. And everyone should avoid contact with outdoor areas that have not been cleaned. Keep children and pets away from ash-covered areas to prevent ingestion or inhalation.

If you experience coughing, wheezing, eye irritation, or difficulty breathing, stop and get fresh air or good ventilation right away. If skin irritation, wash exposed skin and change clothes if they have been contaminated. For persistent or severe symptoms, consult a healthcare provider. Vulnerable individuals should take extra precautions, take steps to reduce their potential exposure, and talk with their healthcare provider.

What precautions should I take to prevent stirring ash and hazardous particles into the air?
To avoid stirring up ash by gently using a damp cloth, mop, or sponge instead of sweeping or vacuuming. If you need to handle larger debris, lightly mist the area with water to keep dust from becoming airborne. Lightly mist with water before gently moving fire debris or items in ash. Avoid using dry sweeping or leaf blowers, as these can disperse ash and soot. Use a HEPA-filter vacuum for fine particles if vacuuming is necessary.

What safety measures should be taken during cleanup to avoid exposure to hazardous materials?
Always wear protective gear, including an N95 or P100 respirator, googles, heavy-duty gloves, long sleeves and pants, and sturdy closed-toe boots. This gear minimizes direct skin contact, protects the eyes, and reduces inhalation of toxic particles. Before beginning work, wet down debris and clean floors and surfaces with a damp cloth or cleaning pad to reduce airborne particles, and avoid touching sharp or broken materials

directly. Remove any visible soot/ash or debris from exterior siding, doors, doorsills, windows, and windowsills using a garden hose and damp cloths first. Be cautious of structural instability or hidden hazards, such as nails or glass in any damaged area. Wash your hands thoroughly after handling debris, and remove and clean your clothing separately from other laundry to prevent cross-contamination.

Are there specific guidelines for cleaning up hazardous materials like lead, asbestos, or heavy metals?
If hazardous materials are present, you should not attempt cleanup without professional assistance. Asbestos and lead require certified specialists for safe removal, as disturbing these materials can release dangerous fibers or particles into the air. Testing by licensed professionals can confirm the presence of these hazards. Ensure compliance with all local and federal regulations, including OSHA and EPA guidelines, to avoid potential health risks and legal penalties. Keep children and vulnerable individuals away from affected areas until all hazards are mitigated.

How do I safely dispose of ash and soot collected during cleanup of my property?
Ash and soot should be handled with extreme caution due to the risk of hazardous particles, such as heavy metals or asbestos. Seal them in durable plastic bags, double-bagging if possible, to minimize the release of particles during transport. Place sealed bags in covered trash bins to prevent them from being disturbed by wind or animals.

What precautions should I take when cleaning soot from outdoor furniture and equipment?
Wear gloves and an N95 mask to prevent exposure to particles. Use a mild detergent and warm water to clean soot from non-porous surfaces, such as metal or plastic furniture. Rinse thoroughly and dry completely to avoid residue buildup. For porous materials like cushions, consider professional cleaning or replacement.

How can I take to clean windows, doors, and screens covered in ash?
Use a hose or bucket of water to gently rinse off ash before scrubbing. Use a damp cloth and cleaning pad to clean windowsills and doorsills. Clean glass surfaces with a vinegar and water solution to remove streaks and residue. Replace or clean screens with soapy water, ensuring they are thoroughly rinsed and dried before reinstallation.

What steps can I take to clean ash-covered driveways and walkways?
Hose down the area to minimize airborne particles, and use a stiff broom to sweep ash into piles. Avoid washing ash into storm drains, as this can harm the environment. Dispose of collected ash in sealed bags in your regular trash.

What steps may help clean smoke-damaged indoor furniture (wood, upholstery)?

- **Wood Furniture:** Gently wipe down with a damp cloth to remove soot. Use a wood cleaner or polish designed for fire-damaged wood to restore the finish.
- **Upholstery**: For fabric furniture, using a HEPA-vacuum just above the fabric followed by steam cleaning can help remove soot and odors. If the upholstery is leather, it may need specialized cleaning products to remove smoke stains and odors. For heavier smoke damage or delicate fabrics, it's best to consult a professional cleaner.

What steps may help to clean smoke damaged clothing and fabric items?
While wearing protective gear outdoors and away from the home, gently shake out visible soot outdoors before washing clothing and linens. Wash items in small loads with detergent. Some suggest adding a cup of white vinegar or other deodorizer to neutralize odors. Repeat the washing process if the smell of smoke persists. Do not use a dryer until all smoke odors are removed, as heat can set the smell permanently. Depending on the amount of smoke damage in your washer or dryer, consider cleaning them inside or having them professionally services and cleaned before using them.

What steps may help to clean electronics with light smoke damage?
Immediately turn off and unplug any electronic devices that may have been exposed to heat or smoke. Use a soft cloth to wipe away soot and ash. Avoid using cleaning products that could damage the device.

For appliances like toasters, blenders, or coffee makers, dampen a cloth with water (and a tiny bit of dish soap for greasy spots) to wipe down the outer surfaces. Avoid getting moisture inside the appliances. If in doubt, consider replacing it.

If the device was exposed to water (from firefighting efforts) or has significant soot or ash contamination, consider replacing it or having it professionally serviced and cleaned. It's often safer to have electronics professionally inspected before attempting to use them again, as the heat from a fire can cause internal damage that's not visible.

What is the best way to clean jewelry and metal items?
Use a mild soap solution and a soft cloth to clean metal items and jewelry. If they are tarnished or heavily sooted, a jewelry cleaner or a paste made of baking soda and water can be used. If the item is valuable or delicate, it's best to take it to a professional jeweler for thorough cleaning.

How should photos and keepsakes be cleaned?
If photos or keepsakes are only slightly damaged, carefully wipe away soot with a soft brush. If they're wet or too smoky, place them in a plastic bag and freeze to prevent further damage until you can clean or restore them properly. For valuable or sentimental items, consult with a professional photo restoration service to ensure proper cleaning.

How can I remove ash and soot from parked vehicles?
Wash vehicles using a gentle hose spray to remove loose ash, then use a mild detergent and water to clean surfaces. Avoid scrubbing dry ash, as it can scratch paint. Rinse thoroughly and check ventilation intakes to remove accumulated debris. If ash has entered the vehicle's interior, vacuum with a HEPA filter and wipe surfaces with a damp cloth.

How do I clean children's outdoor toys and playground equipment?
Wash toys and equipment with a mild detergent and warm water, ensuring no residue is left behind. Replace

sand in sandboxes, as ash and soot are difficult to remove effectively. Keep children away from outdoor play areas until cleanup is complete and confirm that no ash remains on surfaces.

How can I safely dispose of smoke damaged vegetation and yard debris?
Collect burned vegetation and yard debris in sealed bags or containers. Avoid burning debris, as it can release harmful particles. Contact your local waste management agency for guidelines on disposal or drop-off at designated facilities. Ensure ash and debris are not placed in green waste bins unless explicitly allowed.

What should I do if I notice health symptoms during or after cleaning?
If you experience coughing, wheezing, eye irritation, or difficulty breathing, stop and get fresh air or good ventilation right away. If skin irritation, wash exposed skin and change clothes if they have been contaminated. For persistent or severe symptoms, consult a healthcare provider. Vulnerable individuals should take extra precautions, take steps to reduce their potential exposure, and talk with their healthcare provider.

Home Gardens and Soil

Should I test the soil in my garden if my property had no or minimal structural damage?
Testing soils in urban gardens is always a good idea. According UC Cooperative Extension's *Produce Safety After Urban Wildfire* guidance document, "After a wildfire, you can check for soil contamination by collecting soil samples from your garden and sending them to a lab. Before taking samples, draw a map of your food growing area and label it with the spots where you took your samples from. Mapping of your food growing area and soil sample spots is a good idea so you can correlate your test results, and identify spots of concern in case you need to do more testing, and guess what? It can save you time, money, and help you understand on the ground conditions!

Search UC Cooperative Extension County Master Gardener Program webpages for regional analytical soil labs lists; simply search 'UCCE + the County's Name + Master Gardener Program.' Ask your lab for a heavy metals panel that includes lead, cadmium, arsenic, nickel and mercury. Heavy metals tests typically cost under one hundred dollars per sample. Tests for dioxin and other organic chemicals that may be present in smoke can be hundreds of dollars per sample. If heavy metals are present in your soils, there is a greater chance other contaminants may also be present.

Contaminants detected in post-fire soil testing may have been present there before the fire. You will not know if contaminants are present as a result of fire smoke deposits on your produce or soils unless you have had your soils tested prior to a local fire, or unless you have your produce tested after a nearby fire. See University of California ANR's guides on Soils in Urban Agriculture: Testing, Remediation, and Best Management Practices for more information. Search for ANR Publication 8552 https://anrcatalog.ucanr.edu/. Also see: http://ucanr.edu/sites/UrbanAg/ on Food Safety."

Is it safe to eat homegrown produce following a wildfire?
Wildfire ash and soot can settle on soil, plants, and produce. To ensure your homegrown fruits are safe, first check for visible ash in topsoil, plants, and trees. While wearing protective gear, pre-rinse your produce outside with a hose or bucket of clean water to remove soil and ash. Wash hands thoroughly before handling

produce inside. Remove the outer leaves of lettuce or leafy greens. Rinse and rub produce well under cool running water; peel before cooking or serving. Soak deeply veined greens like kale and fuzzy fruits like peaches in a 10% white vinegar solution to remove soil particles. Avoid root crops that grow in the soil like carrots or potatoes as they absorb more contaminants. Avoid planting crops in contaminated soil. Properly washed fruits from trees are safe to eat. For more information refer to the LACDPH Guidance on Eating Produce from a Home Garden.

What should I do if I'm concerned about contaminated soil?
Wildfires can leave behind ash, soot, and harmful contaminants like heavy metals and chemicals in the soil. Review UC Cooperative Extension's *Produce Safety After Urban Wildfire* guidance document more info and recommendations.

Heavily ash-covered soil may require professional testing to determine safety and more specific remediation steps.

If you're concerned about soil contamination, consider testing it for contamination and avoid disturbing the soil to prevent harmful particles that may be present from becoming airborne. Look for visible ash or unusual residues on the soil surface, and limit contact by keeping children and pets away from the area. If you need to handle or turn the soil, wear protective gear such as gloves, an N95 mask, and long-sleeved clothing. Cover bare soil with mulch, tarps, or ground cover to reduce dust and erosion.

Avoid using ash as fertilizer, especially if the fire burned synthetic materials, which include harmful residues.

If you plan to garden or use the soil for other activities, consider building raised beds or containers to create a barrier between potentially contaminated soil and the clean soil plant roots. Adding compost, manure, and peat moss to your soil may decrease chemical absorption into produce. Covering bare soil with wood chips, grass clippings, compost and more clean soil can also decrease exposure.

Schools

Does the Public Health Advisory for those residing near burned structures in Palisades and Eaton Areas apply to schools?
As local officials begin to clear impacted areas for entry, Public Health reminds people about the dangers associated with fire debris within or near the Palisades and Eaton burn areas**.** Individuals in these areas may face an increased risk of exposure to hazardous substances from ash, soot, and fire debris before the completion of **Phase 1 (hazardous materials removal)** and **Phase 2 (fire debris removal)**. Exposure to these materials may lead to physical health symptoms (American Chemical Society, EST Air, 2025, 2, 13-23) and may pose long-term health impacts. Strong winds and weather fluctuations may **increase both the exposure risk and the affected distance**.
Schools that are reopened have been advised to work with remediation experts and take additional precautions to reduce exposures to fire debris that may be newly blown onto school properties. This includes:

- Regularly inspect and clean outdoor areas, playgrounds, and play/sport equipment to ensure prompt removal of any ash or debris that may accumulate.

- Maintaining air filtration systems with high-efficiency (MERC 13 or higher) and keeping window and doors closed as needed. Consider more frequent checking and as warranted, replacing of air filters.
- Monitoring weather, wind, and air quality conditions. Adjust outdoor activities accordingly. Keep children and staff indoors on days with strong winds or poor air quality.
- As needed, work closely with remediation experts, especially when considering conducting soil and other environmental testing.

Restoration Assistance

Is there guidance to follow when seeking professional help?
The following guidelines are helpful when selecting a professional cleaning or restoration service contractor for smoke, soot, and ash restoration.

First, if you're filing an insurance claim, check with your insurance company to see if they have firms they would recommend or firms they contract with for this type of work. If you end up looking for a professional cleaning contract yourself, confirm that the contractor is properly licensed by the State or County and has the required bonding and liability insurance coverage. Additionally, you can ask the contractor if they work with your insurance company and verify this with your insurance agent.

You may also want to check references, check with the Better Business Bureau, and/or follow up with past customers to ask about their experiences with a particular contractor prior to signing a contract.

It is also essential to request certifications from the contractor, including company and employee certifications from organizations like the Institute of Inspection Cleaning and Restoration Certification (IICRC) and the Restoration Industry Association (RIA).

Before agreeing to start or paying for any work, you should also obtain a detailed, written estimate of the work to be done and the schedule for doing it from the contractor, and do not proceed without one. Make sure to review and understand the terms of the contract and what is required by you, such as payment of your insurance deductible. While indoor testing can be helpful in some circumstances, it is important to know that there are no laboratory tests that can determine if your property is "safe", and all lab results must be evaluated in context with environmental conditions in and around your property. It is best to avoid contractors who fail to provide specific cost and schedule details in the contract.

Pets

How can I protect pets from ash and poor air quality?
Keep pets indoors as much as possible, and use air purifiers to improve indoor air quality. Avoid walking pets in ash-covered areas, as they may inhale or ingest toxic particles. Clean their paws after outdoor exposure and ensure they have access to fresh water.

Air Quality

How does poor air quality from nearby areas impact health, and how can I protect myself?
Air quality can change from area to are and from hour to hour, based on your distance from sources of pollution, and the prevailing weather and winds. Poor air quality can affect your health by irritating your lungs, eyes, and throat. It can make breathing difficult, especially for people with asthma, allergies, or heart conditions. Symptoms like coughing, wheezing, headaches, and shortness of breath can worsen in bad air quality.

If the air quality is poor,

- **Stay indoors** as much as possible and keep windows/doors closed.
- **Use an air purifier** with a HEPA filter.
- **Monitor air quality** using apps or websites (check the AQI).
- **Limit outdoor activity** and wear an N95 mask if needed.
- **Stay hydrated** to help your body cope.

How can I improve indoor air quality in my home?
Keep your doors and windows closed on windy days, when the air quality is poor/unhealthy, and during debris removal activities near your property. Use HEPA air purifiers in frequently used rooms to reduce smoke particles indoors. Replace HVAC filters with a MERV 13 or higher rating and run the system on recirculate mode. Keep windows and doors closed until outdoor air quality improves, and avoid activities that generate indoor smoke, such as burning candles or frying food.

Swimming Pools and Spas

My swimming pool or spa was not damaged in the fire but has soot and ash. What guidelines should I follow before using it again?
The swimming pool or spa was likely impacted by smoke, soot, or ash. Do not use it until completing the steps outlined in the LACDPH Swimming Pools After a Fire guidance. Contact your local health department's Recreational Waters Program at (626)430-5360 or email rhealth@ph.lacounty.gov if you have questions.

Community Support and Resources

Where can I find local resources to help clean my property after an evacuation?
Local Assistance Centers (LACs) and Disaster Recovery Centers (DRCs) often provide cleanup kits, guidance, and professional referrals for cleaning services. Contact your local public health department for additional resources, including access to protective equipment and cleaning supplies.

How can I access mental health resources after a wildfire evacuation?
Contact the Disaster Distress Helpline at 1-800-985-5990 for free, confidential support. Local health departments and community organizations may also offer counseling and mental health services for evacuees. Engage with support groups or local recovery events to connect with others experiencing similar challenges.

Are there community programs for vulnerable populations affected by evacuation?
Many local health departments and nonprofit organizations provide targeted assistance for vulnerable groups, including seniors, children, and those with disabilities. Programs may include transportation services, access to clean air shelters, and help with obtaining necessary medical supplies.

Insurance, Documentation, and Financial Assistance

Does insurance cover expenses related to evacuation?
Many homeowner and renter insurance policies provide coverage for additional living expenses (ALE) during mandatory evacuations. Save receipts for temporary accommodations, meals, and transportation costs to support your claim. Contact your insurance provider to confirm eligibility and submit documentation. Notify your insurance provider immediately to start the claims process and provide them with requested documentation. Keep copies of all correspondence and records for your claim. For more resources related to insurance, including *Tips for Wildfire Claimants*, visit the California Department of Insurance's Wildfire Resources webpage.

Are there grants or financial assistance programs for evacuees?
FEMA and state assistance programs may provide financial aid for temporary housing, essential supplies, and other costs associated with evacuation. Local nonprofits and community organizations often offer additional support for uninsured or underinsured residents.

What steps should I take to document property conditions after returning from evacuation?
Take clear photographs of your property, focusing on any changes or issues caused by the wildfire. Note the condition of outdoor areas, such as landscaping and fencing, as well as indoor spaces. Share this documentation with your insurance provider if a claim becomes necessary.

Preparedness for Future Evacuations

How can I better prepare for future wildfire evacuations?
Create an emergency kit with essentials such as medications, important documents, and protective gear. Develop a family evacuation plan, including meeting points and communication methods. Sign up for local emergency alerts to stay informed about evacuation orders.

What steps can I take to make my property more resilient to future wildfires?
Clear flammable vegetation and debris within 30 feet of your home to create defensible space. Use fire-resistant materials for landscaping and exterior structures. Regularly clean gutters and roofs to remove dry leaves and other flammable debris.

How can I ensure my HVAC system is prepared for future wildfire seasons?
Install a MERV 13 or higher filter in your HVAC system to capture fine particles. Schedule regular maintenance

to ensure the system operates efficiently during wildfire events. Seal ductwork and install weatherstripping around doors and windows to minimize smoke infiltration.

How do I store important items to protect them during future wildfires?
Use fireproof safes to store vital documents, such as identification, insurance policies, and medical records. Back up digital copies of important files to cloud storage. Keep irreplaceable items, such as family heirlooms, in a location that is easy to access during an evacuation.