

## FIRE SAFETY PRECAUTIONS for Re-entry and Cleanup

- Use caution when bringing children and pregnant women into an area with ash and damaged structures until cleanup is completed. **Do not leave children unattended at burned properties.**
- Watch for repeated coughing, nausea, unusual fatigue or dizziness, particularly if there is a medical history of chronic lung disease (like **asthma or COPD**) or **heart disease**.
- **Don't breathe the ash from the fires.** Ash can irritate your respiratory system. Adults should use a protective mask (**N-95 or P-100**) while in areas where ash particles cannot be controlled. N-95 masks must be properly fitted and are not designed for children or people with facial hair, subsequently they will not provide full protection. Bandanas (wet or dry), paper or surgical masks, or tissues held over the mouth and nose will NOT protect your lungs. Persons with heart or lung disease should consult their physician before using a mask during post-fire cleanup.



Use Correctly

- **Protective clothing** is important: wear goggles, heavy work gloves, and watertight boots with steel toes and insoles (not just steel shank), long sleeves, and long pants to avoid skin contact. Handle all burned plastics with gloves as possible toxins can come off the plastic.



- **Debris:** Watch for broken glass, exposed: wires, nails, wood, metal, plastic, falling trees and tree limbs.
- Watch for **Ash Pits** and mark them for safety. Ash pits are holes of hot or cold ashes, created by burned trees and stumps. Falling into ash pits can cause burns and/or injuries.
- **Tetanus Shot:** It is recommended for anyone returning to an area affected by a disaster to be up-to-date on their tetanus vaccination. If you cannot remember when you last received a shot or it has been more than five years, you will need a booster. Vaccine will be available at the Disaster Assistance Center, or call Custer County Public Health Agency at 783-3369.
- **Food Products:** Food exposed to fire can be damaged by four factors: heat, smoke, firefighting chemicals, and power outages affecting refrigeration. If you lost power during the fire for longer than 4 hours, it is *recommended* to discard any food that has been at temperatures above 41°F. Perishable food such as meat, poultry, seafood, milk, and eggs that are not kept adequately refrigerated or frozen may cause illness if consumed, even when they are thoroughly cooked. **If you are not certain food is safe, throw it out in designated dumpsters!**
- **Water:** If you are on a private well and your well was close to active burning and/or fire retardant, water can be tested for coliform bacteria (indicator the system has been subject to groundwater contamination) at the Pueblo City-County Health Department. Be sure to use the sterile bottle provided, follow instructions on the form provided. You can pick up an approved water bottle for testing at the Custer County Planning and Zoning Office if you did not receive one at the Disaster Assistance Center.
  - Water testing (initial and follow-up) will only be provided for **private wells**.
- **Septic Systems:** If the septic system is damaged, backing up or malfunctioning, discontinue use and contact the Custer County Planning and Zoning office at 719-783-2669 for guidance and instruction.
- **Fire Retardant:** Use **WATER ONLY** to clean up retardant, as retardant is harmful if mixed with bleach.

- Please call your **propane provider** if you suspect the fire was close to any propane utilities.

## SEPTIC SYSTEMS

**A**n onsite wastewater treatment system, also known as a septic system, could be damaged by fire, power outages, equipment failure, floods or other contamination of water supplies.

### Inspect the system for damage.

- Check above-ground plastic piping that may have been damaged by heat.
- Inspect raised systems scorched or damaged by fire.
- Look for damage to piping where pipes enter the home or structure.
- Check the soil treatment area for damage by large vehicles such as firefighting equipment.
- Check access lids/risers for damage. Any open access to tanks or other components of the system should be flagged as a restricted area to prevent access to the opening.
- Inspect electrical components such as control panels or junction boxes.

If the septic system is damaged, backing up or malfunctioning, discontinue use and contact the county public health or environmental health agency for guidance and instruction.



## WELL WATER SAFETY

### It's your **water**.



If there are any doubts about the safety of the water in the well, contact the county health department or a certified lab for water testing.

- If the water tastes or smells earthy, smoky or burnt, it may be necessary to flush water lines.
- In addition to routine water quality testing, you may want to test your well after circumstances such as flooding or fires. Flooded wells must be thoroughly disinfected before using the water for drinking.

- Inspect the well and its components, including:
  - Electrical wires and connectors that supply power to the well.
  - Above-ground PVC plastic pipes used to bring water to the house.
  - Well houses and special equipment such as chlorinators, filters and electronic controls.
  - Pressure tanks that may have been exposed to excessive heat during fires.
  - Storage tanks, vents and overflow pipes.

## DISINFECTING WATER BY BOILING

Boiling water will kill disease-causing organisms. Sometimes boiling is not recommended if there is a possibility of chemical contamination because boiling will concentrate the contaminants.

- If the water is cloudy, let it settle. Then filter it through a clean cloth, paper towel or coffee filter into a clean container.
- Boil the water for two minutes.
- Let the water cool at least 30 minutes. You can re-oxygenate the water by pouring the water back and forth between two clean containers if the taste seems flat.
- Store the boiled clean water in clean containers with covers.

## IS IT SAFE TO RETURN HOME?

### When you go home.

- If your home or neighborhood was evacuated, do not return until public safety officials give the go-ahead.
- Sign up for notifications from local authorities if you have not already.
- Stay away from downed power lines and tree limbs, broken concrete and asphalt and damaged pipes and gas lines. Avoid debris like broken glass and nails.
- Don't go home if there could be mold in the house. If your floors, walls or furnishings were soaked by rain, floodwaters or fire control efforts, assume you have mold. Contact a qualified professional or your insurance company if you may have mold.
- If your home's phone and internet systems were damaged, make alternative arrangements for communicating. Let family and the authorities know you are back home.
- Don't turn on electrical and natural gas systems or light pilot lights if you are unfamiliar with the possible risks. If you need help, ask your service provider.
- Check foundations and chimneys for damage before entering the house.
- If the house's water source may have been damaged, don't use the water for drinking. Consult with your water provider or a well expert before using the water for drinking.
- Be prepared to encounter rodents, snakes or insects that may have entered a flooded home.