



Okanagan Indian Band  
**A Guide to Re-entry after  
an Interface Fire**

## **Before you return to your community and home**

You are returning to a community where the surrounding area was profoundly affected by a wildfire. Although the Emergency Operations Centre Staff have address any identifiable hazards, unseen dangers may linger, ranging from gas leaks, and weakened foundations to exposed wires and power lines. Using caution can help reduce potential injuries. Play it safe. When in doubt, ask for help or seek advice from an expert. Services that you used to rely on may be limited for some time. You are advised to bring basic necessities with you.

### **DO YOU HAVE:**

A full tank of gas

Proper clothing, a flashlight and clean-up materials

Water for the next 7 days

Food for 7 days, including and special dietary needs

Medications

Pet food/supplies

## Introduction

This guide is intended to provide advice on how to safely re-enter your community and home following an interface wildfire. Your home and community may not look like it did when you left. Please re-enter with caution only after you've been directed that it is safe to do so. Unseen dangers such as danger trees, livestock and wildlife roaming, and downed power lines may be present on your property or roads and surrounding areas. Using caution can help reduce potential injuries. When in doubt, ask for help or seek advice from an expert.

If your property is placed under Evacuation Alert following the removal of an Evacuation Order please be aware that a risk from wildfire remains and you should be prepared for possible evacuation.

## Banking and Insurance Information

If your home has a mortgage, call the bank or company that holds your mortgage to let them know about the wildfires as soon as possible to discuss mortgage or loan payment deferrals if needed:

### If you are insured:

- Contact your insurance company/broker as soon as possible. The sooner the insurance company is notified, the quicker your insurance claim can be processed
- Try to create an inventory of household items, both inside and outside of the buildings, which have been damaged by fire. Photograph or videotape the damage as much as possible
- Work with your insurance company to find out what is covered, what is not covered and what may be subject to further discussion
- Work with your insurance company and their accredited fire restoration companies to try to restore or rebuild your home
- Do not throw away any damaged goods until the insurance assessor says to do so.
- **If you are not insured, the Canadian Red Cross may be able to provide assistance. They may be contacted at 1-800-863-6582 or [www.redcross.ca](http://www.redcross.ca)**

## Returning to Your Community

Once you are able to enter your community, take basic precautions and be aware of hazards to your health and safety.

- Please watch for emergency, firefighting, and utility company vehicles
- Be aware that burned trees are dangerous, highly unstable and can be easily blown over
- Be aware of bears and other wildlife that may be present on your property, on roads or in your neighbourhood
- Be on the lookout for livestock on roads

## Entering Your Home

- Walk carefully around your home and check for loose power lines, gas leaks and structural damage. If you have any doubts about safety, do not enter. If you smell gas, do not enter, and call the FortisBc Emergency Line 1-800-663-9911
- Be careful around burnt structures that may be unstable.
  - Fire damaged buildings and standing chimney's may be a hazard
- Be aware that burnt posts may leave hidden holes in the ground
- Take proper respiratory precautions when working around ash, soot, and demolition dust
- Hazardous materials containers may have been partially damaged or destroyed. Use caution with items such as the following;
  - Kitchen and bathroom cleaning products
  - Paint
  - Batteries
  - Fuel
  - Pesticides or herbicide containers
  - Propane cylinders
- Small animals that have been burned out of their homes may seek shelter in your home. Use caution when opening drawers and cupboards, and look for signs of infestations
- If you see downed power lines on your property, see any damage to hydro infrastructure, or are experiencing fluctuations in electrical service equality, contact BC Hydro at 1-88-769-3766 (1-888-POWERON) or \*49376 on you cell phone
- Wash your hands if you come in contact with ash

## Water & Sewer Considerations

Do not drink, prepare food, or wash with tap water until you are notified that the water system is safe. Use bottled water, boil or disinfect tap water with tablets. If you are on a well or cistern that has been damaged, assume the water is not safe to drink. Contact the OKIB EOC for instructions.

- Before using your water for consumption, take all precautions to flush the system and ensure your water is safe and potable
- Do not use your sewage disposal system until you know it is capable of handling waste, and has not been damaged by equipment and vehicles
- Please contact First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) regarding information and advice on the operation of your water supply and sewage disposal system

## Recommendations for Clean-up

Your insurance policy may cover house cleaning by a fire restoration specialist. The OKIB will provide you with cleanup kits if available. If you are going to clean your residence yourself:

- Wear gloves and goggles when working near ash, keep children and pets away, and ensure proper ventilation in the area you're cleaning
- Smoke odours can last a long time, and you may need to clean everything several times
- Vacuum all surfaces, change heating and air conditioning filters, and have ducts cleaned
- Soot/smoke can be removed from painted walls with trisodium phosphate (tsp), but wallpaper may not be salvageable

- Linoleum flooring may require replacement, but wood and carpet can be vacuumed and washed
- To remove odours from fridges and freezers, wash with baking soda/water, vinegar or ammonia
- Dispose of hazardous materials like solvents and garden chemicals if they show signs of damage. Separate hazardous materials from landfill waste and dispose appropriately

## Disposing of Food from your Home

Discard food that is spoiled, as well as food that has been stored in a refrigerator that has lost power, even if the power has been restored. All perishable items should be disposed of immediately upon your return. When you are trying to decide what food to keep or throw away, be safe and always remember: When in doubt, throw it out.

It is recommended that you dispose of:

- Any unrefrigerated raw vegetables or fruits, and meats, and any porous containers (e.g. cardboard, foam containers, etc.) used to store spoiled food
- Any canned food that is bulging or rusted. Undamaged canned goods should be washed and disinfected if they have been exposed to smoke
- Food in glass jars exposed to heat should be thrown out as seals may have broken
- Any food displaying an off odour or signs of spoilage

Food waste can be disposed of at the RDNO transfer stations in Vernon or Armstrong. There will be additional waste removal pick-ups planned as well. Please refer to the OKIB website or Facebook page for an updated schedule.

Discard food that is thawed. If your freezer has been exposed to fire, or has been without power for more than three (3) days, throw out all contents.

If your refrigerator or freezer contains spoiled foods, it is recommended that the appliances be sealed with the contents inside. The OKIB will be organizing roadside pick-up of refrigerators and freezers. Please contact the OKIB EOC to discuss collections procedures and to request assistance for getting your unit the curb.

Contact your insurance provider regarding refrigerator and freezer replacement process.

If you are an OKIB member and do not have insurance please contact the OKIB EOC for details on the replacement process.

## Transfer Station Locations

Greater Vernon Diversion & Disposal Facilities (DDF)  
120 Birnie Rd.  
4km south of Vernon on Hwy 97

Armstrong/Spallumcheen DDF  
3367 Powerhouse Rd.  
1 km north of Armstrong on Hwy 97

## BC Wildfire Service Property Damage

If there is damage to your property due to wildfire suppression activities, the BCWS will address it during their rehabilitation planning.

## Air Quality

It is important to note that air quality could remain poor as a result of smoke from the nearby wildfire activity.

## Mental Health

If you need help, or know of someone in need of help, because of depression or other mental health concerns, call:

### Band Members

**Hope for Wellness Help Line** offers immediate mental health counselling and crisis intervention by phone or online chat. Call toll-free 1-855-242-3310 or start a confidential chat with a counsellor at [hopeforwellness.ca](https://www.hopeforwellness.ca).

**Kuu-Us Crisis Line Society** provides crisis services for Indigenous people across BC. Adults/Elders line 250-723-4050; youth line 250-723-2040. Or call toll free 1-800-588-8717. Learn more at [www.kuu-uscrisisline.com](https://www.kuu-uscrisisline.com).

### Non-band Members

The **Mental Health Support Line** 310-6789 (no area code). This number will connect you to your local BC crisis line without a wait or busy signal, 24 hours a day. Crisis line workers are trained to help provide emotional support as well as mental health information and resources.

Call 811 or visit [www.healthlinkbc.ca](https://www.healthlinkbc.ca) to access free, non-emergency health information for anyone in your family, including mental health information. Through 811, you can speak to a registered nurse about symptoms you're worried about, or talk with a pharmacist about medication questions.

## Recovery Issues

The Okanagan Indian Band is currently working with the Province of BC and Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) to identify funding, and other opportunities to support of residents impacted by the 2021 wildfires. These activities include:

- Refrigerator and fridge pickup and replacement
- Danger tree removal on private property
- Damaged or lost fencing on private land
- Feed or crop loss in fields
- Livestock loss