

Safety after a disaster

Building Fire

After a disaster, property damage may cause unusual and additional safety hazards. Many disaster-related injuries and deaths occur during cleanup. Here’s what to check:

Item	Action	Status
Gas	Smell for gas. If you smell natural or propane gas or hear a hissing noise, leave the property immediately and move away from the building. Call the fire department. If the fire department instructs you to do so, turn off the gas with the proper tool at the valve on the outside meter. When natural gas is turned off at the main valve, a professional must turn it back on following the proper sequence to prevent possible gas leaks, fires or an explosion. If you have a propane tank system, turn off all valves and contact a propane supplier to check the system before using it.	
Smoke and embers	During the first few days back, check for smoke and embers throughout the building, including the attic.	
Animals	Beware of animals, such as rodents, snakes, spiders and insects that may have entered the building. As you inspect the building, loudly tap the floor with a stick to scare them away. Animals avoid humans and will leave if you make your presence known.	
Electrical systems	If you see sparks or broken or frayed wires, or if you smell hot insulation, turn off the electricity at the main fuse box or circuit breaker.	
Breaker	Inspect the panel box for any tripped breakers. A tripped breaker may indicate damaged wiring inside the building. Do not turn on tripped breakers. Instead, turn them to the off position. Mark them with a piece of tape so a qualified electrician can check for hidden internal electrical problems.	
Heating systems	If equipment in the building is connected to a heating oil tank, turn off all valves and consult a plumbing-and-heating specialist before using.	

Plumbing	If you suspect sewage lines are damaged, avoid using sinks, showers or toilets, and call a plumber. If water pipes are damaged, turn off water at the main valve and call a plumber.	
Toxic fumes	Items such as cleaning products can cause toxic fumes and other hazards if they mix. If you smell a noxious odour or your eyes water from fumes, open a window and leave the building. Call for professional help. If the spilled chemicals do not pose a health risk, put on rubber gloves and other protective clothing. Dispose spilled chemicals and rags used for cleaning according to the advice of local authorities.	
Burnt Plastics	Be careful when removing burned items from the building. Handle all burned plastics with rubber gloves as possible toxins can come off plastic.	