



A Tradition of Stewardship
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CAUTIONS ABOUT RETURNING TO A DESTROYED HOME

Below are some basic guidelines for returning to your property after the fire. This is not an all-inclusive list, just some thoughts to get one headed the right direction. Be careful, use common sense and think about what you are going to do before you act or take a step. Keep yourself and your family safe.

First visit: It is going to be extremely emotional when you return to your property. It is suggested that you stay on solid ground and not attempt anything more than taking pictures at this time. One needs to be both mentally prepared and with protective gear before entering the damaged area, otherwise one disaster may lead to another.

Plan of attack: Once you are able to clearly focus, think about where irreplaceable, special things which could survive extreme heat might have been. Start with areas where jewelry or metal keepsakes might have been located. It is recommended that you look only for valuable/irreplaceable items; if it is something that can be replaced, likely best to do just that as the heat will have damaged its integrity.

Protective gear: A good dust mask is mandatory along with gloves and boots. As ones wardrobe is likely limited at this point, it is suggested that you purchase coveralls or other clothing specifically for the task of searching because you will get filthy. Breathing in ash is very bad for one's health, so please wear a good dust mask though they may be uncomfortable.

Entering the structure: Be extremely careful as to where you step. What may appear solid may be weak and give way. There may still be hot spots, so be wary of heat. If the structure still has sections standing, be careful of wall and beams as they may fall at any time. Remember safety first – move slowly and very carefully. A layer of ash may be deceptive and hide dangers below.

Hazards: Think of where paints, chemicals or batteries were stored. These areas likely have hazardous residues – steer clear. Incinerated things can have very sharp edges or points which can easily cut or puncture you. If you trip or fall, don't expect a soft landing in the ash.

Once done: When you are ready to leave, remove gloves, boots, coveralls and bag them. Remove mask last after the dusty work is done. Don't just get in your car without first changing, or your car will remind you of this visit for months to come.

Photos: Take photos to document the damage.

Professional help: The clean up task should be left for professionals once you have collected what mementos you are able to find. It takes specialized equipment and knowledge to safely clean up the remnants.

Be Safe: Above all else be safe! Don't be thinking "it is only once, it won't happen to me, I can do this though it is risky". Things can be replaced, you can't. No prized possession is worth risking injury. You survived the fire, don't be hurt by its aftermath.