

Checklist of Steps to Take After a Wildfire

Re-establishing safety and routines after losing a home to a fire is a process that involves multiple, layered steps.

Here is a comprehensive plan to help guide you through the recovery process:

1. Immediate Response (0-3 days)

A. Safety and Shelter

- **Find Safe Shelter:** Ensure that you and your loved ones are in a safe location. This could be with family or friends, a shelter, or a temporary housing arrangement provided by insurance or local agencies.
- **Assess Immediate Health Concerns:** Check for injuries and seek medical attention if necessary. Inhalation of smoke or burns might not be immediately obvious.
- **Avoid Re-entering the Burned Area:** Wait for authorities or fire officials to declare the building safe before re-entering the property to retrieve anything.
- **Emergency Supplies:** Ensure that basic needs such as food, water, clothing, medications, and personal hygiene items are covered.

B. Emergency Documentation, Important Notifications

- **Contact Your Insurance Company:** Notify your homeowner's insurance company to begin the claims process. Make a list of the damage and take photos if possible.
- **Inform Relevant Entities:** Notify your employer, school, or any other organizations where your absence or disruption may affect activities.

C. Communication

- **Designate a "point person" who is outside the trauma:** Ask a friend or loved one to handle communications with other people in your network of support.
- **Autoreply.** People who care about you will reach out to see if you're safe and how they can help.

You DO NOT owe any one person a reply.

Part of being in crisis is that the normal rules change.

Right now, you need to focus on your immediate safety and stabilization needs.

Create an "autoreply" in your phone and email system to direct everyone who reaches out to your designed point person.

- **Communicating Specific Needs.**

It may take time to figure out what you need.

Let your point person know what you need as the situation evolves.

Don't hold back from being specific, as in:

I need:

- Temporary housing in the Los Angeles area,
- I need to get away from the LA area for a few days
- I need someone to drop off meals
- I need someone to pick up these household items
- I need an attorney to advise us on insurance related negotiations
- I need someone to fold our kids into their lives for the next couple weeks while we explore housing options.

Your point person should field all communications, ensure your friends and family that you're safe and ask for whatever help is needed in a centralized way.

2. Short-Term Stabilization (1-2 Weeks)

A. Emotional Support

- **Access Mental Health Services:** Seek counseling or join a support group for those affected by fire. This can help address trauma, anxiety, grief, and other emotional impacts.

I'd like to offer a safe space for those impacted to connect and heal. All those impacted by these devastating wildfires are welcome.

Topic: **LA Fire Survivors - CONNECT AND HEAL** (Hosted by Dr. Shauna Springer)

Time: WEDNESDAYS at 3 p.m. PST starting Jan 15, 2025

NO COST TO ATTEND

[Join Zoom Meeting](#) Meeting ID: 863 4577 1085 (Passcode: 351766)

Description: This weekly virtual group will offer a safe and supportive gathering - FREE OF CHARGE - for survivors of the Los Angeles area wildfires. The purpose of these sessions is to help survivors connect and begin to heal from these devastating losses. This meeting is hosted by Dr. Shauna Springer, a nationally renowned psychologist and native of Pacific Palisades, CA, who specializes in trauma recovery.

- **Maintain Emotional Routines:** Try to keep some daily rituals, like regular meals, time for rest, and staying connected with loved ones.

B. Practical Steps for Recovery

- **Secure a Long-Term Shelter:** Work on securing more permanent housing arrangements (e.g., renting, staying with family or friends, or through disaster relief programs).
- **Rebuild a Safe Environment:** Make sure the temporary shelter is secure and free from hazards. If you're staying in temporary housing or a shelter, ensure that fire alarms and exits are clearly marked.
- **Financial Assistance:** Look into disaster relief programs or community funds. Many organizations, including the Red Cross and local government agencies, offer financial aid for basic needs.

C. Insurance and Legal Considerations

- **Work with Insurance:** Meet with an adjuster to begin the claim process for rebuilding or replacing lost items. Make an inventory list of damages and lost possessions.
- **Legal Assistance:** Consult a lawyer if you have legal questions related to your insurance policy, tenant rights, or compensation for losses.

3. Medium-Term Stability (1-3 Months)

A. Routines and Stability

- **Re-establish Household Routines:** While staying in temporary housing, start re-establishing regular schedules for meals, chores, work, school, and recreation.
- **Physical and Emotional Recovery:** Continue counseling and therapy, if needed. Regular exercise, proper sleep, and healthy eating can aid in emotional and physical recovery.
- **Create Safe Spaces:** If you have children, create spaces for play or quiet time, so they can continue developing routines even if they are in an unfamiliar living situation.

B. Rebuilding a New Home or Long-Term Housing

- **Assess Housing Options:** Start looking for long-term housing, whether it's rebuilding the original home, finding a new rental, or purchasing a new home.
- **Temporary Housing to Permanent Housing Transition:** Ensure that your temporary housing is suitable until you can move into a more permanent home.
- **Work on Finding a New School or Daycare (if applicable):** If you have children, coordinate with their school or daycare to help transition them to a new environment or set up virtual learning if necessary.

C. Practical Help and Services

- **Clean-Up and Salvage:** If it's safe to do so, begin the process of sorting through salvaged belongings. Many items may not be usable, but some may be repairable.
- **Repair and Reconstruction Plans:** Begin working with contractors, architects, or city officials to develop a plan for rebuilding your home. Keep the insurance company involved in this process.
- **Document Everything:** Keep track of all expenses, receipts, and claims related to your recovery, whether for insurance purposes or for potential tax deductions.

4. Long-Term Recovery (3 Months - 1 Year)

A. Adjusting to a New Normal

- **Adopt New Routines:** Gradually implement new routines that fit into your post-disaster life. This may include integrating new activities, setting up a new home, or starting over in a different location.
- **Rebuild Connections:** Reconnect with the community, including neighbors, schoolmates, or religious organizations. This can help provide a sense of normalcy and support.
- **Volunteer or Help Others:** Giving back or helping others who have been affected by similar situations can foster healing and build a new sense of purpose.

B. Complete the Rebuilding Process

- **Home Reconstruction:** If rebuilding your original home, stay involved in the planning process to ensure it meets your needs. Be prepared for delays and unexpected costs.
- **Financial Stability:** Ensure you are financially stable by managing expenses, adjusting to new living costs, and setting up long-term financial planning.
- **Personal Property Replacement:** Continue replacing essential personal belongings that were lost in the fire. Some items may take longer to replace depending on availability.

C. Emotional Closure

- **Grief and Acceptance:** Understand that emotional recovery can take time. Be patient with yourself and those around you. Create new memories in your rebuilt or new home and embrace healing as a continuous journey.

Ongoing Considerations

- **Safety Measures:** Once in your new home, ensure that you are protected with prevention measures like smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, and fire escape plans.
- **Mental Health Maintenance:** Continue ongoing therapy or support groups to deal with any residual trauma. Keep working on stress management and well-being.

By following these steps, you can begin to rebuild not only your physical environment but also emotional and practical routines, leading you toward recovery and stability.