



THOUGHTS ON RISK MANAGEMENT: FIRE RECOVERY

As with most types of disasters, the damages from a fire may vary widely, depending on building and situation-specific considerations. Yet in many cases, the series of response and restoration steps that immediately follow a fire are similar from incident to incident. Here are some of the common steps along with brief explanations for why they are important:

CONTACT INSURANCE COMPANY

As soon as the flames are extinguished, your insurance company should be the first contact as they will need to come out, inspect the damage, and file a claim.

SAFETY ASSESSMENT

The first and most important step after any fire is an assessment of building safety. Experts need to look for structural issues along with other dangers, such as asbestos or chemicals that could harm people re-entering the building. They also need to determine if anything in the building requires special disposal considerations.

SECURING THE PROPERTY

Since fires are often high-visibility incidents that leave parts of buildings open and exposed, it's important to quickly secure the area. Otherwise, curious onlookers, employees or even looters could enter unsafe areas.

PREVENTING ADDITIONAL DAMAGE

Before the real restoration work can begin, you may need to take steps to prevent further damage from the elements to exposed areas of a building. For example, insulating newly exposed pipes from freezing, during cold winter months.

PROTECT YOURSELF FROM SMOKE ODORS

Although the flames may be extinguished, smoke odors are extremely dangerous and will cause further destruction to building materials and personal contents. If the fire department has allowed you to re-enter the property, be sure to wear a breathing mask to prevent the smoke from getting into your lungs. In addition, it is best to wear gloves to prevent the oil from your hands from further compromising the fragile remains of the affected surfaces.





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DAMAGE ASSESSMENT

A full damage assessment can't begin until officials determine the building is safe. Only then can experts look more closely at potential damage to building features, such as the HVAC and electrical systems and determine what property, documents and goods might be salvageable.

CLEAN UP

Since the damage from smoke and water increases quickly with time, restoration providers aim to start the clean-up process as soon as it is safely possible. The process itself can involve a host of steps, usually starting with addressing water or chemical damage from sprinklers and other fire-fighting efforts. Restoration teams may use cleaning agents and structure cleaning solutions in an attempt to salvage flooring, furniture and any equipment or other items impacted by soot and smoke. It's especially important to begin document and book recovery processes as quickly as possible, since paper begins to disintegrate as soon as it is exposed to water.

Deodorization is one of the most important steps in the fire recovery process because odors can have a lasting impact on employees and customers. Depending on the extent of the damage, these steps can take time so it's important to be aware.



REENTRY OR RETRIEVAL COORDINATION

One of the first things that people want to know after a fire is extinguished is when they can go back in to check on key business assets and get their stuff. The timing always depends on site-specific circumstances and environmental factors, such as whether or no asbestos or dangerous chemicals are present. In the case of a fire, there is always the possibility that some or all items may not be recoverable. And in many cases, the recovery may need to involve coordination with hygienists and other specialists.

... AND THAT'S JUST THE BEGINNING

Clearly, recovering from a fire can involve a lot of work. And while a good restoration provider can often move quickly to help you get part or all of business operations moving again, your contingency plans will also be critical to the speed with which you are able to get back to normal. After all, if your team doesn't have an action plan in place, you'll be scrambling just to figure out things like who should be coordinating with your insurance broker and managing communications, rather than taking the steps needed to get on the road to recovery.