

# **“Recovering From The Fire”**

## **A Citizen’s Guideline to Beginning the Recovery and Rebuilding Of Your Life or Business**

**Written and Compiled by the  
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The first goal of the Monroe Fire Department, to which we have committed in our Mission Statement, is to provide "quality public service." In our effort to fulfill this commitment, we endeavor to provide not only public assistance in preventing fire and fire suppression, but service after the fire.

We recognize that a fire in your home or place of business can be devastating, not only emotionally but economically. Getting your life back together and your business running again is most likely your highest priority.

Many citizens and business owners have experienced the same challenges and have had the same questions about this process. For this, we have produced this information package. It is our hope that this will help ease the process of returning your life, home, or business back to normalcy.



### **Safety: After the Fire**

You're probably anxious to enter the structure and inspect the damage to the building and the contents. Please be aware that certain hazards may exist in your home or business.

#### *Ceiling Damage*

In many instances, the fire has burned from the origin of the fire up to the ceiling and continued burning through the ceiling into the attic. This may cause damage to the ceiling tile or drywall. In some cases, the firefighters have to remove the ceiling to extinguish the fire to find all spots of extension of the fire (or "spot fires") to insure the fire was completely extinguished. This may cause the ceiling in some areas to have remaining fragments that may fall.

#### *Toxic Gases*

Before departing, the firefighters are required to inspect the interior for any residual harmful gases that may remain from the burning materials. In each room of the structure measurements are made to detect any residual carbon monoxide or other harmful gases. The firefighters use fans or natural wind to remove these gases from the structure until all measurements are well below the harmful range. After the firefighters leave, there should be no remaining harmful gases. However, if you feel lightheaded, unusually tired, become short of breath, or experience any other symptom of concern, leave the structure immediately and call the fire department for assistance. If serious signs and symptoms are present, such as severe shortness of breath, chest pain, or unconsciousness, call 911.

#### *Electrical Wiring*

In many cases, electricity has been disconnected from the structure. However, do not consider the

electricity as having been disconnected unless you have been advised of this by the electric company or a Chief Officer with the fire department. Use **extreme caution** when operating around electrical outlets or wiring, or walking in standing water that could be in contact with electrical wires, devices, or extension cords.

#### *Natural Gas*

As is the case with electricity, in many situations we have to disconnect the natural gas if any damage to the gas lines or devices, such as stoves or heating units, is suspected. However, do not assume the gas supply has been disconnected until advised by a representative of the gas company or a Monroe Fire Department Chief Officer. We recommended that all persons around your structure refrain from smoking or igniting any flame until the disconnection of natural gas has been confirmed.

Natural gas alone has no smell, but a smell usually associated with rotten eggs or sulfur is added to assist in its detection. If you smell any odor that smells like rotten eggs or sulfur, exit the area immediately and call the gas company and the fire department.

#### *Airborne Contaminants*

Sometimes airborne particles such as drywall dust may be present inside the structure. This may cause complications in persons with certain respiratory conditions such as asthma. Consider wearing a dust mask commonly available at many hardware stores.

### **Security**

Before leaving, as a courtesy the firefighters may attempt to secure your structure. However, after the fire department leaves, the security of your

structure is your responsibility. The security of the structure is the responsibility of the owner of the property. If it is safe to enter the structure, remove any valuables and secure them in another location. Also, you may consider contacting the Monroe Police Department and requesting they provide "extra patrol" in your area.

### **Fire Reports**

A fire report has been created by the responding firefighters and investigators to document the cause (if known), extinguishment, and damage to your home or business. Your insurance company or charitable organization may ask you for a copy of the fire report. It can be obtained from the Monroe Fire Department's office at the Monroe Public Safety Center located on Highway 165 Bypass South, at 1810 Martin Luther King Boulevard. For more information during business hours, call 329-2474.

### **Damage to Your Structure**

Some damage to your structure may be caused by firefighters searching for hidden spot fires. Finding spot fires is critical to preventing a reoccurrence of the fire. If these spot fires are not found, they may cause the fire to return several hours or even days later, causing further damage to your structure.

#### *Holes in the Roof*

Interior fires can produce temperatures in excess of 1,200 degrees F. In some instances, in spite of the firefighter's protective gear and equipment, this may prevent the firefighters from being able to reach the base of the fire, causing the fire to burn more and cause more damage to your structure.



Cutting a hole in the roof above the fire allows the heated air and gases to be released from the interior of the structure, allowing firefighters to reach the seat of the fire and quickly extinguish the fire. Whenever a hole is necessary, we always cover the hole using roofing paper and tacks in an attempt to prevent water leakage.

#### *Open or Broken Windows*

Opening windows allows natural wind to remove heated air and unsafe gases to be removed from

the structure, allowing our firefighters to safely enter the structure.

Some windows are broken outwards during the burning of the structure. Also, in the event the appropriate entry door of a structure is unable to be opened or breached, sometimes it's necessary to use force to gain entry into a structure through a door or a window.

If there are holes in the interior drywall of your structure, it's usually because the firefighters had strong reason to suspect a fire within the wall, between the drywall and the frame.

### **Utilities**

#### *Electricity*

For safety reasons, if sufficient damage to your structure necessitated it, the electric company was probably called to disconnect electricity from your structure by pulling the electric meter. This will prevent electricity from entering the structure to prevent accidental electrical shock. In many instances, electrical wiring has been damaged by melted insulation or by the firefighter searching for hidden fire. An electrician will need to repair and inspect the wiring before the electricity can be reconnected.

#### *Natural Gas*

As with electricity, the natural gas lines in your home may be damaged from the fire or the salvage and overhaul process. Contact the natural gas company for inspection of any suspected broken gas lines.

### **Cleanup After The Fire**

In some instances, your homeowner's insurance company can provide coverage for cleaning professionals to restore most of your home or business back to working condition. The professionals are usually aware of the hazards and dangers of working in a post-structure-fire environment.

Any food, beverages, medicine, or cosmetics that were exposed to fire or toxic gases should be discarded in an appropriate manner, including home-canned foods. Commercially canned foods that are without dents, bulges, or bubbling can be cleaned with a mild detergent and disinfected with a mild bleach solution (two tablespoons per gallon of water) and reused.

Mattresses that have sustained water damage may mildew before completely drying out, creating

mold, which can cause unexpected illness or allergic reactions in many people. Consideration should be given to disposing of mattresses that have water damage.

For clothing, consult the care and usage tag on each garment for cleaning instructions. Consider using a commercial cleaning service for your clothes, particularly delicate or valuable clothing. Many home remedies suggest a variety of methods to remove the smoke smell from clothing. Some of these are included below. Use these remedies at your own risk. These are only a few ideas of how to remove the smoke smell from your clothes. Many more are available with research. The Monroe Fire Department cannot be responsible for undesirable results from any of these suggestions.

- Hand washing in a mixture of ½ cup of ammonia and water and rinsing in vinegar. Wear household cleaning rubber/latex gloves. **DO NOT EVER** mix ammonia or use a container that once contained ammonia or anything that contains ammonia with bleach or Clorox. Rinse with water and dry completely.
- Wash with an oxy-type cleaning powder in addition to ordinary clothes detergent.
- Commercially available odor-removal solutions, such as Odoban™

Dishes, glassware, pots and pans should be hand-scrubbed using scrub brush and warm soapy water to remove any debris or particles remaining after the cleanup. Rinse with clear water and a mild bleach solution and rinse again. Inspect all for any cracks or defects and discard any dishes with cracks, as bacteria may remain in the cracks.

Plastic cookware, utensils, or cups, as well as wooden bowls and spoons should be discarded, or used for things other than food if exposed to smoke or gases, as they cannot be disinfected.

Walls can be washed with a mild detergent or soap. Wash a small area at a time to insure the desired result. Rinse immediately. Do not paint until the wall is completely dry. Consult a painting specialist or a paint dealer for more information.

### **Fire or Property Insurance**

You should contact your insurance agent or company as soon as possible after the fire. For

the structure fire and contents, contact your homeowner's (or renters') insurance provider. If your vehicle was damaged in the structure fire, contact your vehicle insurance provider. If you have enter your home or business to retrieve your policy information, be sure to follow the safety recommendations found in this document, and other common-sense safe practices.

### **Remaining In Your Home**

Use extreme caution when considering whether or not to continue residing in your home. The Monroe Fire Department makes a reasonable effort to insure there are no harmful or toxic gases in your home before departing. However, as stated elsewhere in this document, some airborne particles may still be present which can be irritating or harmful to some people, such as persons with asthma or other respiratory conditions, the elderly, or those who are pregnant.

Strong consideration should be given to finding other housing arrangements.

Your homeowner's insurance company may be to assist you with obtaining temporary housing. Also, the American Red Cross may be able to provide temporary housing, as well as food and clothing.



If you do choose to relocate, you may consider contacting some of the following (if applicable) to notify them of your change of address.

- United States Post Office, for Change-of-Address forwarding of daily mail
- Your Employer
- Banking and other Financial Institutions
- Credit Card Companies
- Utility Companies
- Schools and Daycare Facilities
- Church
- Friends and Family
- Doctor's Offices
- Social Security Administration
- Newspaper Delivery
- Monroe Fire Department (for follow-up after the fire)

**FOR FURTHER ASSISTANCE**

For any questions or needs not covered in this document, contact the Monroe Fire Department at 329-2474, or 329-2508 and so you can be put in contact with someone able to help you.

**USEFUL CONTACTS**

Monroe Fire Department	
Emergency.....	322-5151, or 911
Non-Emergency (To request service) .....	329-2508
Fire Reports or Fire Investigators .....	329-2474
Monroe Police Department.....	329-2600, or 911
Entergy (Electric) .....	(800) 368-3749 or (800) Entergy
Atmos Energy (Natural Gas)	
Emergency Line (if you believe you have a gas leak) .....	(866) 322-8667 or (866) ECAtm
Residential Customer Service .....	(888) 286-6700
Commercial Customer Service .....	(877) 460-7067
City of Monroe Water Department.....	329-2359
City of Monroe Garbage Collection.....	329-2209
Monroe City Schools .....	325-0601
American Red Cross	
Local .....	323-5141
Toll Free .....	(888) 323-5141
Disaster Action Team.....	327-1014

**NOTES**

Some of the pictures used in this document are courtesy of The News Star.

This document is produced as a courtesy to the citizens of Monroe. This document contains suggestions that are commonly made in situations similar to yours. You should consult with cleaning and insurance professionals for more information on many of the content of this document. The Monroe Fire Department cannot be held responsible for any undesirable outcome resulting from the information contained in this document.