



FEMA

News Release

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OEM News Desk: 503-378-3930
FEMA News Desk: 425-487-4610

Plan Ahead Before Going Home

SALEM, Ore. – As evacuation levels change, people affected by the fires are eager to know when it is safe to go home. As conditions may be unknown in an area, it is important that residents follow the advice of local authorities to learn when it is safe to return. Residents should also check road closures and conditions to know the safest way to travel. Check roads by visiting Oregon Dept. of Transportation's [TripCheck.com](https://www.tripcheck.com).

Once local authorities have given the all-clear to re-enter properties, homeowners should take steps to protect themselves and others, when cleaning up after a wildfire. Many dangers may remain, such as ash and fire debris, which can be toxic.

Staying safe around ashes:

- **If you see ash** or a layer of dust, keep children away until it has been cleaned.
- **Cloth face coverings, paper masks or bandanas are not effective** at filtering out fine airborne ash, dust or asbestos fibers. N95 or KN95 respirators, if properly fit, tested and worn, can offer protection from airborne particles.
- **Avoid activities that could stir up ash** and make it airborne again, like using a leaf blower, dry sweeping, or vacuuming without a HEPA filter.
- **Use rubber gloves when cleaning up ash.** Wash any ash off of your body or clothing right away.
- **To clean up ash outdoors:** Gently dampen the ash – do not use a pressure washer, which will generate dust before it wets things down. Then use a vacuum with a high efficiency HEPA filter if you have one. If you don't have a HEPA-equipped vacuum, gently sweep or scoop up the ash.
- **To clean up ash indoors:** Use a damp cloth to clean surfaces, a wet mop on floors. Do not use a vacuum to clean up ash unless it has a high efficiency HEPA filter.

- **Turn on an air purifier or ventilation system** with a HEPA filter, if you have one, to help remove particles from indoor air.
- **Find more safety tips** on the [Oregon Dept. of Environmental Quality](#) website.

Making your yard safe:

- **Extinguish hot embers.** Check for them in yard debris, rain gutters or crawl spaces, on the roof, and under overhangs and decks.
- **Clear away debris.** Move it away from the house to the edge of your home.
- **Check the electric meter.** If there is visible damage, don't turn the breaker on. Call your utility company.
- **Stay clear of electrical wires on the ground.** Report them to your utility company.
- **Check the gas meter, gas lines or propane tank.** If there is visible damage or if you smell gas, call your local utility or propane company.

Before entering structures: If you have safety concerns, have a qualified building inspector or structural engineer inspect your structures. Don't enter if you smell gas. Turn off the power before you inspect your structure. Use a flashlight, but turn it on outside because the flashlight battery may produce a spark that can cause a fire.

Entering your structures safely:

- **Check for immediate dangers.** This includes remaining fire and fire damage, and wild or domestic animals that may have taken refuge.
- **Check the attic.** Embers may have entered through vents.
- **Keep appliances turned off** until you have determined the electric meter and electrical lines are undamaged.
- **Discard food** that has been exposed to heat, smoke, or soot.
- **Don't drink or use water from the faucet** until emergency officials say it's okay. Water systems may become polluted if there is post-fire flooding.
- **Take safety precautions for utilities:**
 - Electric – If you turn on the breaker and still have no power, contact your utility company.
 - Propane tank or system – Turn off the valves and call your propane supplier to inspect the system.
 - Heating oil tank system – Call your supplier to inspect it before you use it.
 - Solar electrical system – Have it inspected by a licensed technician to verify the solar panels and wiring are safe.

Documenting Damage and contacting your insurance company. Call your insurance agent. Make a list of the damage and document it with photos and videos. Keep all receipts for repair and cleaning costs.

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Disaster recovery assistance is available without regard to race, color, religion, nationality, sex, age, disability, English proficiency or economic status. If you or someone you know has been

discriminated against, call FEMA toll-free at 800-621-FEMA (3362) 711/VRS - Video Relay Service). Multilingual operators are available. (Press 2 for Spanish). TTY call 800-462-7585.

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