

NORTHERN INTER-TRIBAL HEALTH AUTHORITY

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS

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Saskatchewan Wild Fire 2015

In 2015, Saskatchewan experienced one of the harshest wildfires in the history of the province. Over 50 northern communities were evacuated, outlying properties damaged, critical infrastructure impacted and most importantly approximately 13,000 people evacuated from their homes. Fortunately, no lives were lost as a direct result of the smoke and no serious injuries occurred. As the temperatures soar in Saskatchewan and the British Columbia fires escalate by the day, it is important to be prepared in case we experience a fire season similar to the one that happened 6 years ago.





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SMOKE/WILDFIRE

What is a Smoke/ wildfire emergency?

Smoke and wildfire are an annual occurrence in the North. These situations become emergent when fire threatens a community or its critical infrastructure such as power lines. Smoke from wildfires can rise to unsafe levels or make roads impassable due to poor visibility.

What happens in the community during a Smoke/wildfire emergency?

Local officials will be monitoring air quality and posting bulletins of recommendations daily. Evacuations may happen quickly during a fire threat. Evacuations of health priorities may be necessary even when the fire itself is not threatening a community. Fresh air shelters equipped with air scrubbers may be set up within the community to offer reprieve from poor air quality or to allow a community to shelter in place. Asset protection in the way of sprinklers may be set up to protect community assets and infrastructure.

What can an individual do to prepare for a Smoke/wildfire emergency?

Listen to local area radio or TV stations. Read public bulletin boards and attend community meetings for the latest information and updates. Be prepared to evacuate quickly and know your routes and destinations. Follow air quality health recommendations such as staying indoors, reducing physical activity, keep windows and doors closed, turn off air exchangers, etc. Other helpful tips and recommendations include;

- **Limit outdoor activity** and strenuous physical activities as much as possible. If you have difficulty breathing, reduce your activities or stop altogether.
- **At home:** Keep indoor air cleaner by avoiding smoking or burning other materials.
- **Care for others:** Watch out for others in your care who may be more vulnerable to smoke.
- **Leave the area:** If you are able to, make arrangements to move to a location with cleaner air, possibly a fresh air shelter within the community.



REPORTING A WILDFIRE EMERGENCY - INSTRUCTIONS

- Call 9-1-1 where available to report a forest fire.
- For non-emergency calls use the ten-digit numbers listed in your local phone book or this emergency plan for police or fire services. Turn off the power and water mains if instructed to do so by local authorities.

In an emergency

- Follow your emergency plan.
- Get your emergency kit. You will need some basic supplies. You may need to go without power or tap water. Be prepared to be self-sufficient for at least 72 hours.
- Make sure you are safe before assisting others.
- Listen to the radio or television for information from authorities. Local officials may advise you to stay where you are. Follow their instructions.
- Stay put until all is safe or until you are ordered to evacuate.

Evacuation orders

- Authorities will not ask you to leave your home unless they have reason to believe that you may be in danger.
- If you are ordered to evacuate, take your emergency kit, wallet, medications, personal identification for each family member and copies of essential family documents with you. Bring a cellular phone and spare battery with you if you have one. Use travel routes specified by local authorities.
- If you have time, call or email your out of town contact. Tell them where you are going and when you expect to arrive. Once you are safe, let them know. Tell them if any family members have become separated.
- If possible, leave a note telling others when you left and where you are. Shut off water and electricity if authorities tell you to do so.
- Leave natural gas service on unless officials tell you to turn it off. If you turn off the gas, the gas company has to reconnect it. In a major emergency, it could take weeks for a professional to respond.
- Take your pets with you. Lock your home. Follow instructions from authorities.
- If you go to an evacuation centre, register your personal information at the registration desk. Do not return home until authorities advise you to do so.

BASIC EMERGENCY KIT and recommended additional items – *See Appendix 1 - Evacuation Check Sheet

Make copies of important documents

- Make copies of birth and marriage certificates, passports, licenses, wills land deeds and insurance. Take photos of family members in case a lost persons record is created. Keep them in a safe place, both inside and outside your home. You might want to put them in a safety deposit box or give them to friends and family who live out of town.



EVACUATION DURING COVID -19 PANDEMIC

In circumstances where suspected/probable cases are being evacuated with other community members, the risk of COVID-19 is heightened. This also poses a risk for host communities. Furthermore, any community members who test positive for COVID-19 should be medically evacuated to either an appropriate health care facility where they can receive care or to another location where they can remain in self-isolation (such as a host community). The above recommendation arises from the increased transmissibility of variants of concerns (VOC).

Guidance:

- In the context of the public health threat of more transmissible variants of concern (VOC), it is prudent that medical masks be worn by community members when physical distancing of 2 meters cannot be maintained and when there is a possible exposure to VOC during evacuation.
- The use of medical masks must be in conjunction with other Public Health measures such as hand washing and hand sanitizing.

Contraindications to the use of medical masks:

- Masks are not recommended for:
 - people who live with illnesses or disabilities that make it difficult to put on or take off a mask without assistance
 - those who have difficulty breathing
 - children under the age of 2
 - Between the ages of 2 and 5, children may be able to wear a mask if supervised. This will depend on their ability to tolerate it as well as put it on and take it off.



POWER OUTAGE

What is a power outage emergency?

Power outages are common in the North. Outages of 2 hours or less rarely have significant impacts and are generally NOT an emergency. Prolonged power outages become emergent when critical infrastructure such as water treatment, food storage or heat is lost in the winter. Losing power also impacts the community's ability to operate health clinic services.

What happens in the community during a power outage emergency?

For prolonged outages local shelters may be set up in places within the community that have generator power and are therefore able to maintain heat and other services. Potable water and sanitation services may be setup. In extreme cases evacuations of sensitive populations may be necessary. If you have a generator or there is a facility that has generator power within the community it is recommended that carbon monoxide alarms be installed in central locations and sleeping areas. This will provide early warning of accumulating carbon monoxide. Do not run gas powered equipment indoors.

What can an individual do to prepare for a power outage emergency?

Listen to local area radio or TV stations. Read public bulletin boards and attend community meetings for the latest information and updates. Follow the advice below;

- Use flash lights in the dark, not candles.
- Eliminate unnecessary travel, especially by car. Traffic lights will be out and roads will be congested.
- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible. An unopened refrigerator will keep foods cold for about 4 hours. A full freezer will keep the temperature for about 48 hours.
- Use your non-perishable foods and staples after using food from the refrigerator and freezer.
- If it looks like the power outage will continue beyond a day, prepare a cooler with ice for your freezer items.



FLOOD

What is a Flood emergency?

Floods are among the most frequent and costly natural disasters. Flooding often occurs following a hurricane, thawing snow, or several days of sustained rain. Flash floods occur suddenly, due to rapidly rising water along a stream or low-lying area. Floods that impact critical infrastructure, contaminate water supplies or isolate communities due to road washouts can all be emergencies.

What happens in the community during a Flood emergency?

Multi agencies may respond to the community to assist local officials in protecting critical infrastructure or at-risk assets (homes, roads etc.). Sandbags and other barrier equipment may be deployed and community assistance may be needed to set this equipment up.

What can an individual do to prepare for a Flood emergency?

Listen to local area radio or TV stations. Read public bulletin boards and attend community meetings for the latest information and updates. Be prepared to evacuate quickly and know your routes and destinations. Check your emergency kit and replenish any items missing or in short supply, especially medications or other medical supplies. The following safety precautions are also recommended;

- Turn off the power and water mains if instructed to do so by local authorities.
- Boil tap water until water sources have been declared safe.
- Don't use gas or electrical appliances that have been flooded.
- Dispose of any food that comes into contact with flood water.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HEAVY SMOKE CONDITIONS

Air Quality Category based on 1 hour average	Health Effects	Cautionary Statement	Other Actions for Health Team
PM2.5 = 0 to 40 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ Good Visibility = 15km and up	None	None	
PM2.5 = 41 to 80 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ Moderate Visibility = 10 to 14 km	Possibility of aggravation of heart or respiratory disease.	People with heart or lung disease should pay attention to symptoms. If symptoms increase contact, your health care provider.	Issue PSA advising public about health effects and symptoms, and ways to reduce exposure.
PM2.5 = 81 to 175 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups Visibility = 5 to 9 km	Increasing likelihood of respiratory symptoms and aggravation of lung disease such as asthma.	People with respiratory or heart disease, the elderly and children should avoid physical exertion and limit time spent outdoors. If symptoms of heart or lung disease (repeated coughing, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, wheezing, chest tightness or pain, heart palpitations, unusual fatigue or light-headedness), contact your health care provider.	If smoke event projected to be prolonged, evaluate and notify possible sites for cleaner air shelters. Prepare evacuation plans for sensitive groups.
PM2.5 = 176 to 300 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ Unhealthy Visibility = 2.5 to 4 km	Increased respiratory symptoms and aggravation of lung and heart diseases; possible respiratory effects to general population.	People with respiratory or heart disease, the elderly and children should avoid prolonged exertion and stay indoors when possible; everyone else should limit prolonged exertion and time spent outdoors. If symptoms of heart or lung disease (as above), contact your health care provider.	Consider canceling public events, based on public health and travel considerations (e.g. number of people, physical exertion event, etc)
PM2.5 = 301 to 500 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ Very Unhealthy Visibility = 1.5 km	Significant increase in respiratory symptoms and aggravation of existing lung and heart disease; increasing likelihood of respiratory effects of general population.	People with respiratory or heart disease, the elderly and children should avoid any outdoor activity; everyone else should avoid physical exertion and stay indoors if possible. If symptoms of heart or lung disease (as above), contact your health care provider your health care provider.	Cancel outdoor events (e.g. competitive sports). Consider having sensitive groups go to cleaner air shelters in community.
PM2.5 = > 500 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ Hazardous Visibility = < 1 km	Serious aggravation of heart or lung disease and premature mortality in persons with cardiopulmonary disease and the elderly; serious risk of respiratory effects in general population.	Everyone should avoid any indoor and outdoor exertion; everyone should remain indoors whenever possible. If symptoms of heart or lung disease (as above), contact your health care provider.	If smoke projected to continue for a prolonged time, consider evacuation of sensitive groups.

Adapted from: Saskatchewan Population Health Unit, Preparation for Forest Fires and the Assessment of Health Effects from Forest Fire Smoke, 2016



ACTIONS FOR SMOKE RISK

a) It is recommended that advice be provided to community members in the form of an "Air Quality Alert", which may be disseminated through local media (e.g. radio station) or through leaflets. Advice provided would include:

- i) remain indoors if possible
- ii) keep doors/windows closed (avoid vacuuming, frying or broiling foods, using paints or solvents or other indoor pollutants)
- iii) reduce physical activity
- iv) avoid smoking or avoid exposure to second hand smoke
- v) conserve energy, avoid fatigue

Locally available accommodation with climate control (eg. schools, community halls) could be used as temporary shelter as required while smoke conditions last.

b) When a community is experiencing heavy smoke and it appears (following discussion with the Fire Management and Protection officers) that the heavy smoke will remain for some time, a selective priority evacuation of those at particular risk (after careful screening by local health professionals) would be considered advisable. Special consideration should be given to keep family units, caregivers and support people together especially for Priority #1 and #2 groups.

Consideration should be given to the following individuals, in order of priority:

Priority #1:

- People experiencing symptoms such as worsening cough, shortness of breath beyond what is usually experienced, difficulty breathing without exertion, chest pain or tightness, fluttering in the chest or feeling lightheaded, significant weakness or fatigue
- People with respiratory and / or cardiac conditions

Priority #2:

- Elderly, frail or unwell
- People who have difficulty walking
- Newborns, infants and children (5 years of age and under)
- Pregnant women
- People requiring special care and supportive care (e.g. wheelchair, stretcher, institutional residents, those on dialysis, homecare)

Priority #3:

- People without symptoms who have chronic illnesses that are not cardiac or respiratory
- Others case-by-case

Consideration should be given for keeping family units together.

Note: Caution, common sense, and flexibility should be key criteria in the decision-making process. If decisions are made to evacuate, movement of evacuees should only be undertaken when safe to do so.



CLEANING UP AFTER A FOREST FIRE

Coming home after a mandatory evacuation can be a relief and also a lot of work if your home has suffered excessive smoke infiltration or if soot/ash has been deposited in your home or if there has been a disruption in power or water services. The smoke will infiltrate your home and the odor will stay because the smoke particles are so small they can hide in the small spaces of cloth and wood. Removing the smell of smoke is a big task. The following information should provide you some guidance on how and what to clean in your home as well as offer you some safety tips for personal protection.

A note of caution: Using room sprays or scented candles or scented oil burners will only mask the smell of smoke and can cause breathing difficulties to those exposed to the perfumes over time.

Getting prepared

- Before starting any cleanup be sure it is safe to be in your home. Ensure that the evacuation orders have been lifted and if there was any structural damage to the home that it has been assessed as safe.
- Have appropriate **personal protective equipment** available.
- If you will be disturbing soot, a face mask may be required and gloves, long sleeved shirts and pants to protect your skin. You may wish to use an apron to protect your clothes as well.
- If you do get soot or ash on your skin, wash it off as soon as possible.
- Open all windows and doors (preferably using intact screens) to start ventilating your home. You may wish to use fans as well to increase the air flow.
- Limit the movement around your home if there is soot present so you don't imbed it into cloth surfaces (carpets and furniture) If soot has been deposited, it will be necessary to deal with it **before** cleaning and odor relief. Soot is oil and should be removed as much as possible with a powerful vacuum. On sooty fabrics, do not use a vacuum or any machine or attachment with brushes or beater bars.

Getting started

- **After ventilating the area**, start by removing any soot from the surfaces. Start with the carpets and upholstered items like curtains, so the soot isn't further imbedded into the fabric. You can use a vacuum for this as long as it doesn't have a beater bar that "puffs" the soot back into the air to be inhaled or if it can be vented to the outside.
- Hold the vacuum nozzle slightly above the surface and let it suck in the soot.
- Once the soot is removed from the carpet, you can use a rotary carpet cleaner (with brushes) to further remove the odors.
- For **walls** with painted gyproc, wallboard, wall paper or wood with soot present, it is recommended to use a dry sponge to remove as much soot as possible. This should prevent the soot from being transferred deep into the surface where it may look like a stain later.
- For all other **hard surfaces** like countertops, toilets, appliances, basins, vinyl and ceramic flooring, wipe down with hot soapy water.
- Remember to clean inside cupboards and drawers.
- Determine which items are the most valuable and clean them in order. Some items may have come with specific cleaning instructions from the manufacturer, like a tv. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for chemical use.



- Smoke odors can remain in **fabrics/clothes** for a very long time. Soaking cloth overnight with detergent or adding bleach to the wash cycle (if it is safe to do so), before a wash cycle may help. Using 1 cup of vinegar in the wash cycle, along with detergent may help remove odours. One wash may not remove the smoke odor, so check for smoke odor before drying the clothes. Continue to wash them without drying until the odour is gone.
- If you dry the clothes with the odour still in them, you will likely “set” the smell into the cloth permanently.

You may wish to cover cleaned surfaces with clean sheets or towels so they do not become dirty again as you continue cleaning other items and areas.

Other Items for Consideration

- Your community may be on a Boil Water Advisory, follow the instructions of the advisory.
- For those with **breathing concerns such as asthma or COPD** it may be very beneficial to have a HEPA (High Efficiency Particulate Air) filter on your vacuum or on an air purifier in the home to assist in the removal of air borne particles such as smoke, dust mites, pet dander and pollen.
- If your **power services** was disrupted, you will likely have spoiled food in your **fridge** (unless the power was only off for approximately 2 hours). If the power was off for more than two hours, the food will be unsafe and need to be discarded. If your power was off for more than a day, the foods in your **freezer** likely thawed and may be rotten and need to be discarded as well.
- Your furnace duct work may require professional cleaning if a lot of soot was pulled into your home from the outside air. Consider having your home assessed by a professional cleaning company.
- Change your **air filters** on all appliances that have them when you first return to the premises and at least once a month for the first year. (furnaces, air conditioners and air purifiers)
- Check your **smoke detectors** to ensure they are working correctly, they may need battery replacement.
- Flush your **water lines**, especially the hot water if you have been out of the home for some time.

Odour removers

Vinegar, baking soda and activated charcoal. White household vinegar can remove some odour naturally. Using undiluted vinegar to wipe down hard surfaces like floors, tiles, countertops etc. can help eliminate some of the smoke odor. Leaving out bowls of household vinegar, baking soda or activated charcoal throughout your home may also help eliminate some of the smoke odours. Activated charcoal can be more difficult to find and purchase.



Febreze®. Febreze® is a well-known odour reducer product sold in grocery - type stores. Its active ingredient is a sugar-like substance that absorbs odors. Using Febreze may help to reduce smoke odor.

Fresh Air. Fresh air is the best way to remove odor. Keep windows and doors open as much as possible.

Ozone Generators. Ozone generators are the next level for odour removal. Although they can work very well they are expensive pieces of equipment, and will not completely remove the odor.

REFERENCES:

How to Remove Smoke and Smell From a Home, Texas A&M Agrilife Extension.

Handling Smoke Damage after a Fire – Getting Soot and Smoke Out, University of Florida, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Services.



APPENDIX 1 - EVACUATION CHECK SHEET

Emergencies can happen at any time and without warning. Be ready. With a little preparation, you can respond quickly to help yourself and others. Understand the risks in your area, create a household emergency plan and build an emergency kit.

- A supply of water (one gallon per person per day) and two additional litres of water per person for cooking and cleaning. Store water in sealed, unbreakable containers. Identify the storage date and replace every six months.
- A supply of non-perishable food, such as canned food, energy bars and dried foods and a non-electric can opener.
- A change of clothing, rain gear and sturdy shoes for each household member.
- Wear protective clothing and sturdy shoes.
- Blankets or sleeping bag or warm blanket for each household member.
- A first aid kit.
- A battery-powered radio, flashlight and plenty of extra batteries.
- Crank, battery-powered radio (and extra batteries) or weather radio. Listen to a battery powered radio for the location of emergency shelters. Follow instructions of local officials.
- Credit cards and cash.
- Lock your house. Be sure to have an extra set of keys to your car and house.
- Shut off water, gas and electricity, if instructed to do so.
- A copy of your emergency plan, contact information such as a list of family physicians, important family information; the style and serial number of medical devices such as pacemakers.
- If applicable, special items for infants, elderly or for people with disabilities, such as prescription medications, infant formula equipment, or food, water and medication for your pets or service animal. (personalize according to your needs)
- Use travel routes specified by local officials.
- Let others know when you left and where you are going.
- Make arrangements for pets. Animals may not be allowed in public shelters.
- Candles and matches or lighter (place candles in deep, sturdy containers and do not burn unattended).
- An extra pair of glasses.



- Toiletries
- Hand sanitizer
- Utensils
- Garbage bags
- Toilet paper
- Water purifying tablets
- Basic tools
- A whistle
- Duct tape



APPENDIX 2 - EVACUATION OF CLIENT WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Name: _____ Age: _____

Address: _____ HSN: _____

Treaty No.: _____ Cell #: _____

Name of Next of Kin: _____

Phone number and/or cell number from another community: _____

Diagnosis: _____

Special Diet: _____

Medications: (or a photocopied list of medications)

Required care: (appointments, prescriptions, treatments, etc.)

Information provided by: _____

Health Centre address: _____

Health Centre phone # _____

Physician Name & Clinic phone #: _____ Date

filled out: _____