



How to Contact NITHA

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NORTHERN INTER-TRIBAL HEALTH AUTHORITY

Cleaning up After a Forest Fire





Cleaning up After a Forest Fire

Many health hazards can exist upon returning to a community that has been evacuated due to forest fire or excessive smoke in the area. Once residents have returned to their community, many health hazards will need to be addressed by the individual residents in their homes.

One of the initial risks may be in the water supply. Check to see if your community has a drinking water advisory. Upon returning to your community, you may need to take precautions and boil their water until the advisory can be lifted. Soot exposure and clean up as well as the potential for rotting foods or unsafe foods being in the home is another potential hazard to be addressed. Ongoing cleaning and odour removal may require supports and access to appropriate waste removal areas.

The odours from smoke can result in nausea, headaches, or worsening of respiratory symptoms. Exposure to contaminated water, food, and respiratory irritants could encourage another health related outbreak or concern. Following the tips below may assist you in completing the cleaning process and ensure a smooth transition back to your homes.



Precautionary Measures that can be taken include:

- Wear personal protective equipment such as a mask, eye goggles, rubber gloves and long sleeved shirts and pants when cleaning or coming into contact with soot or ash or excessive smoke odour.
- Follow the instructions given by local agencies to ensure the safety of all residents.
- Remove food that has not been held at appropriate temperatures or is now outdated.
- Wipe all internal surfaces; counters, windows, tables, stoves, using a cloth with warm water and detergent. Vinegar and baking soda will help with the smoke odour.
- Clean floors with a damp or wet mop; avoid initial cleaning with a vacuum if the exhaust goes inside the home as it could add to the fine dust in the air. For rugs, if you need to vacuum, be sure to have good ventilation with windows or doors open.
- Wash and scrub external surfaces such as decks and walls to rid your home of ash and soot.

- Smoke odours can remain in fabrics for a very long time. Launder all clothing.
- Keep windows and doors open as much as possible to remove the smell of smoke.
- Change air filters for your heating, ventilating and air-conditioning units when you first return to your home.



- Wash your hands frequently; remember to do so after using the washroom, before eating and after coughing or sneezing.
- Flush your water lines in the house especially the hot water if you have not been in the house for the evacuation period.