



Returning Home Safely – What's

A Guide for Residents – September 2025

Returning home after a wildfire and community evacuation can be stressful and traumatic.

**DO NOT RETURN HOME UNTIL YOUR
COMMUNITY GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES IT IS
SAFE TO RETURN!**

Changes to the land

- Think about what you will see, hear, and smell in your community once you return.
- The fire has changed the land you live on. It may be difficult to see – remember that the forest will grow back.

Continued firefighting efforts/dangers

There will be continued firefighting efforts in the community. Steer clear of equipment for safety reasons and give crews space to do their work.

DANGEROUS TREES, ASH PITS, AND HEAT

It is extremely dangerous to travel through burned areas right now.

- Damaged trees may be at risk of falling. Exercise caution in wooded areas.
- There may be areas within the burnt area where there are hot ashpits which could hurt you if you fall in them.
- If you must enter a burned area, always keep at least two treelengths between yourself and the nearest tree.

SMOKE AND FLAREUPS

- The fire is not out – you may see flareups in the distance, but the community is secure because there is very little forest fuel left nearby.
- Wildland firefighters will continue to monitor the situation and take action as needed.
- Take care of your health. On smoky days, stay inside if you have health problems.

Checklist: Items to have when you return

Here is a list of recommended items that will help you in the recovery process:

- Charged cell phones
- Radio
- Flashlight/lantern
- First Aid Kit
- Camera or video camera
- Notebook and pen to record any damage
- Buckets, mops, sponges & cleaning supplies
- Trash bags
- Personal protective equipment (gloves, face masks, protective clothing and shoes, etc.)
- Food and drinking water (recommended to have 3 days of food and 4 L of water per person, per day, for 3 days)

Checklist: If in doubt, throw it out!

- Discard any food that has been exposed to heat, smoke, or soot. This includes food like dry goods (i.e. flour, sugar, and spices) even if the package hasn't been opened.
- Other products like paint, batteries and damaged fuel containers may need to be disposed of properly to avoid risk.
- Check with your doctor or health centre for advice if any medication needs to be disposed of.

Take pictures

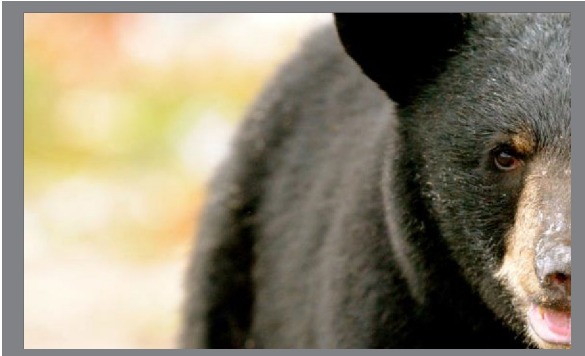
Documentation is key. Take photos of any damage before cleaning or throwing things away. This documentation will be important for any insurance claims.





Waste management – Be bear aware

There have been bears sighted within the community of Whatì throughout the evacuation. Any waste created as you clean your property and settle back into your home should be safely stored until it can be disposed of safely.



Checklist: Cleaning your yard



Check the stability of any trees around your property. Look for damage to the tree trunk or signs of burned tree roots.

- Any trees that have been damaged by fire will need to be removed.
- Wet down any soot or ash before cleaning it to minimize health impacts of breathing it in.
- Rinse off air intakes and air conditioners with a water hose. Do not use air hoses or leaf blowers – this could drive more particles into your home.
- Use mild detergent and clean water to wash children's outside toys, play equipment, and recreational equipment.
- Any garden soil or sand boxes that may have been impacted by fire or firefighting materials should be removed and replaced.

Taking care of yourself and others

Traumatic events like emergencies and natural disasters have a big impact on your mental health.

SEEK HELP

If you or someone you know is feeling stressed or overwhelmed, there are supports and resources available to help, including:

- NWT Helpline: 1-800-661-0844
- For non-urgent health advice, call 811 or 1-844-259-1793 to speak to a nurse about health advice.

If you or someone else needs urgent medical help, call 9-1-1.

Do small things to take care of yourself:

- Eat nutritious food.
- Stay hydrated.
- Try to rest often.
- Pace yourself while cleaning up, take breaks and don't feel pressured to tackle it all at once.

