

COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA



RETURNING TO YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

THOMAS FIRE

What should I do first?

Returning to a damaged or destroyed neighborhood is a traumatic occurrence, and you may feel overwhelmed by the many tasks ahead. Remember that self-care is the vital first step for you to remain healthy and resilient. The emotional and physical health of you and your family should be your first concern.

If you have children, leave them with a relative or friend while you conduct your first inspection of your home after the disaster. The site may be unsafe for children, and seeing the damage firsthand before you have had a chance to prepare yourself emotionally may cause long-term effects, including nightmares.

Mental health services are available 24/7 through the Santa Barbara County Department of Behavioral Wellness, toll-free at (888) 868-1649.

For assistance with physical health questions, there are many excellent resources regarding smoke exposure available at countyofsb.org. If you are feeling ill, consult with your physician.

Your right to privacy

The media has been actively involved with keeping our community informed during this fire and continues to pursue stories about the fire's impacts. You may be approached by reporters or camera crews as you return to your neighborhood; you have no obligation to consent to interviews, photographs or filming. Make and communicate your decisions based on your own needs and the needs of your family.

Returning home

Prior to giving you clearance to return to your home, a building inspector has visited the site. You will want to be aware of these issues.

Potential neighborhood concerns:

- Trees, brush and rocks may be weakened or loosened by fire and may lose limbs or fall.
- Rocks loosened by fire may roll and crumble. If rocks have rolled down a slope expect more to follow.
- There may be debris or damage from fire on roads and driveways.
- Utility poles may be weakened by fire.

Being careful as you return home:

- Do not remove or walk past colored tape that was placed over doors or windows to mark damaged areas unless you have been told that it is safe to do so.
- Check the outside of your home before you enter. Look for loose power lines, broken or damaged gas lines, foundation cracks, missing support beams or other damage. Damage on the outside can indicate a serious problem inside.

Things to look for as you return home:

- Is your well or pump-house in working order?

Going inside your home:

- If the door is jammed, don't force it open – it may be providing support to the rest of your home. Find another way to get inside.
- Sniff for gas. If you detect natural or propane gas, or hear a hissing noise, leave the property immediately and get far away from it. Call the fire department after you reach safety.
- If electricity is off, make sure all appliances are turned off. Once you are sure all appliances are turned off, if there is no fire damage to your home and the meter does not have any visible damage, you may turn on the main circuit breaker.
- Check if the phone is working and notify your service provider if it is not.
- Check if security system and alarms are working.
- Beware of animals, such as rodents, snakes, spiders and insects that may have entered your home. As you inspect your home, tap loudly and often on the floor with a stick to give notice that you are there.
- Damaged objects, such as furniture or stairs, may be unstable. Be very cautious when moving near them. Avoid holding, pushing or leaning against damaged building parts.
- Open windows and doors to ventilate and/or dry your home.
- If power is out, use a flashlight. Do not use any open flame, including candles, to inspect for damage or serve as alternate lighting.
- Make temporary repairs such as covering holes, bracing walls, and removing debris.
- Take photographs of the damage. You may need these to substantiate insurance claims later.

Checking your utilities:

- If there is **ANY** visible damage to the gas meter, gas lines, or propane tank, **DO NOT** attempt to repair or turn on these services. Call your local propane company or utility.
- Look at the electric meter. If there is visible damage, **DO NOT ATTEMPT** to turn the breaker on.
- If there are electrical wires on the ground, **STAY CLEAR** and contact your local utility immediately.

Where can I get help?

The Thomas Fire has been designated a disaster by the federal, state, and local governments. As such, a variety of resources will be available to affected residents. Locally, the Santa Barbara County Office of Emergency Management is coordinating efforts to help you get your life back on track. In the coming days, the County will be in touch with information.

Federal Resources

FEMA: The Federal Emergency Management Agency can give you information about federal assistance programs. By completing an anonymous questionnaire online at <https://www.disasterassistance.gov/get-assistance/find-assistance> you will be given a list of potential resources based on your particular situation and needs. These include:

Disaster Legal Services (available through Department of Homeland Security for low income disaster survivors) for assistance with:

- Insurance claims for medical bills, loss of property, loss of life
- New wills, powers of attorney, and other legal papers lost during the disaster
- Home-repair contracts and contractors
- Problems with landlords

Transitional Sheltering Assistance covers the cost of staying in a participating hotel. The hotels are listed here: <http://femaevachotels.com/index.php>

Low Interest Loans offered through the Small Business Administration for those with no or insufficient private insurance:

- up to \$200,000 to repair or replace damaged structures
- up to \$40,000 to replace basic possessions

Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) offered through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency, makes payments to producers of eligible crops when there have been low yields or loss of inventory due to a natural disaster.

Cleaning Up

Ashes and burned areas of your home contain unhealthy materials and should be approached with great care. Wear protective clothing, including long sleeves, long pants, sturdy shoes, and snug N-95 dust masks. It is best not to clean up ash while it is still actively falling.

- **Control:** Try to control the amount of ash particles that get re-suspended into the air. Avoid using any equipment that blows ash into the air such as standard shop vacuums or leaf blowers. Instead, use household vacuums or shop vacuums with HEPA filters.
- **Contain:** Contain ash by gently sweeping indoor and outdoor hard surfaces followed by wet mopping with a damp cloth. Ash may be disposed of in regular trash receptacles or in plastic bags. You may also allow water from cleaning to drain into landscaping as ash will not hurt plants or grass.
- **Capture:** Protect storm drains from ash and any cleaning chemicals used while cleaning by diverting away from storm drains or recapturing. Ash is highly acidic, which in large amounts can be harmful for people, the environment and aquatic life.

Professional cleaning of home heating, air conditioning and ventilation systems is recommended once the fire and smoke has subsided.

Insurance claims

- Save all receipts for your fire related expenses, including lodging, supplies and repairs.
- Contact your insurance agent, broker or insurance company as soon as you can to report how, when and where the damage occurred. Provide a general description of the damage.
- Prepare a list of damaged or lost items and provide receipts if possible. Consider photographing or videotaping the damage where it occurred for further documentation to support your claim.
- If possible, keep damaged items or portions of those items until the claims adjuster has visited your home. Do not throw away anything you plan to claim without discussing it with your adjuster first.
- Make copies of all documents and pictures given to your claims adjuster or insurance company. Besides insurance, there are many questions related to taxes, expenses and your personal financial recovery.

Re-building

Santa Barbara County Planning and Development (<http://sbcountyplanning.org/>) will be aware of the difficulties you have experienced and will help you navigate the complexities of building.

California Contractors State License Board Disaster Help Center (http://www.cslb.ca.gov/Media_Room/Disaster_Help_Center/) can assist you in assessing the reputation of any contractor who you are considering for your job.