

Survivors Speak: Smoke Restoration

Part of the [“Survivors Speak” Tip Series](#)

The “*Survivors Speak*” publication series offers suggestions and perspectives from UP volunteers based on their personal experiences after large losses and in their own words. The series is part of United Policyholders’ extensive library of free information. The UP library includes tips written by UP staff and professional expert volunteers and non-profit and government partners across the country. Visit our complete library at www.uphelp.org.

This list has been compiled as a resource to help you navigate the process of smoke restoration. Take time to talk to whomever you are considering to hire and inquire how this process is completed on their end. Smoke restoration techniques, equipment, and business owners change over time.

The smoke restoration process varies from company to company but most use the same procedures, factoring in how close the fire came to your house or which direction the wind was blowing and for how long. The longer that your house is closed up with smoke inside, the more excessive the damage can be. A company will come in and measure your house, usually with a laser pointer, to know the square footage of damage, and will charge based on this square footage.

Inside Your House

First, a restoration company will open up your house, windows and doors, and start running HEPA air filters to clean the air and eliminate the smell of smoke. Every part of your house that has smoke damage (usually the entire house) will be cleaned. Walls, cabinets, shelving, appliances, plates, utensils, windows etc.—anything that has been contaminated. In your pantry, salvageable items will be wiped down and anything that cannot be cleaned will be removed.

Furniture will also need to be cleaned. Wood furniture will be wiped down and upholstery will be vacuumed about 3 times (soot removal) as will the carpets. Carpets may need to be shampooed. Some upholstered furniture may be too damaged to be salvaged.

Clothing, drapes, bedding, and towels will need to be washed or dry cleaned.

Early in the process workers will take a sample off your walls using a “make up” type sponge to determine how much contamination you have. (Flat wall paint is more prone to absorb the smell of smoke.) Most will send this off to a hygienist to determine if the sheetrock has absorbed the smoke. The insulation will be checked for soot, inside the walls and attic. If there is any sign of contamination it should be sucked out and replaced.

Water damage due to refrigerators and freezers being turned off due to power outage can also be an issue. Flooring and subfloors may need to be replaced.

The HVAC system will need to be thoroughly cleaned and should not be turned on until the cleaning is complete.

Outside Your House

The outside of your house will be checked for paint blisters. Windows will be checked for any warping, moisture between the layers, or edge deformation. The house and patios will be pressure washed.

All of these things are based on how much smoke damage you have so verify when interviewing restoration companies what procedures they will use on your house. Some companies have licensed contractors so that they can do all of the work themselves while others sub the more extensive work out.

To Keep in Mind

Companies seem to all use the same equipment and if they don’t own it, then they will rent it. Being a “preferred insurance vendor” does not mean that a company you hire will “side” with your insurance company. Their relationship with the insurance company makes for a more trusting resolution. Without these relationships the insurance companies are just like you, having to take a chance on who they hire.

Hire Qualified Help When You Need It

If you decide to hire professional help, please read United Policyholders’ tips on Hiring Professional Help at www.uphelp.org/hiringhelp. Check with your local health department, Better Business Bureau, or

other trusted resources to find qualified help. Check references, license status, and membership in professional associations before hiring.