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Interior Cleaning Guide

As evacuation orders from the My Way Trading Warehouse fire start to lift in Richmond, Indiana, residents will begin returning to their homes. EPA will start scheduling exterior debris removal, and as they do so, residents may also want to clean the interior of their properties. Below, we have worked with the Red Cross and the Agency for Toxic Substances & Disease Registry (a part of the CDC) to develop guidelines as to how to properly air out and clean personal property within structures impacted by a fire.

Outdoor Debris Removal

Do not move or try to clean up any suspicious debris left from the fire. To register the property for debris removal, fill out the form here: <https://www.richmondindiana.gov/news/debris-form>. To clean surfaces, use a regular garden hose to wash ash, soot, and dust off the item. If visible residue remains, use a mild cleanser with a damp cloth to clean.

Airing Out Structures

If smoke is suspected within the property, start by ventilating the structure. If windows can be opened, open windows and doors for a few hours. A box fan can be installed to create additional airflow. During this time, ensure air conditioning (or heating) units are turned off to prevent recirculating smoky air throughout the house.

Persistent Odors

Baking soda and activated charcoal absorb odors naturally. Leave a few loose bowls of either around the house for several days to assist with mitigating any remaining smells. To ensure best coverage, leave closet doors open as well as other doors that may typically be kept closed, such as kitchen and bathroom cabinets.

Leftover Food

Do not rely on appearance, odor, or taste to determine whether food is spoiled. Dispose of any fresh food that shows signs of damage or spoilage by placing the items in trash bags and sealing them properly. Throw away promptly.

Cleaning the Interior

To ensure thorough cleaning while protecting skin from strong household detergents, wear gloves during cleaning a property's interior. Wipe down any items that appear to have visible ash or dust and be sure to clean frequently touched items such as light switches, remotes, food prep areas and children's toys. After completing the cleaning, wash hands thoroughly with soap and water before removing the gloves.

Hard Surfaces

- Clean hard surfaces, including the inside of cabinets, drawers, and closets, by using soap and water.
- Wash pots, pans, and flatware with soap and water, rinsing thoroughly.
- Use soap and water to remove visible soot from walls, floors, and furniture. Rinse surfaces with clear water, then dry thoroughly. If washing walls, start in small sections (floor up) to prevent streaking; wash ceilings last. If walls have wallpaper, do not overly wet the walls—commercial paste can help to glue down any sections or edges that come loose.

Soft Surfaces

- Clean soft surfaces, including carpets and rugs, by first vacuuming up visible residue. Air out the home during vacuuming (small amounts at a time) and take frequent breaks.
- If visible residue remains, wash items using soap and water.

Laundry Items

- Launder any clothing or clothing-type items using detergent and machine-recommended water temperature
- Adding 1 to 2 cups of vinegar to the wash cycle is a powerful way to move odors and/or residue.
- Note that some materials may require multiple washings. After wash cycles, ensure that items are thoroughly dried.