

## STEP TWO: FIRST THINGS FIRST



*Do these things as soon as possible after your home has been damaged or destroyed. Do them before you leave the property, if you can.*

- **If you rent or lease the home, contact the building owner or manager.**
- **Get your family settled.** If your home is unliveable, and you cannot stay with family or friends, you can go to temporary housing arranged by local Emergency Social Services personnel. Following a large disaster, the local government may establish temporary housing in secure Group Lodging facilities where possible. Try to keep the family together – togetherness provides mutual support.
- **If you are insured, contact your agent, broker or insurance company.** (See *STEP NINE* in this booklet for more on this topic.) Do this as soon as possible to get your claim underway. Most policies cover the cost of shelter, food and clothing for the reasonable time needed to repair or rebuild your residency up to policy limits.
- **Remove valuables and essential items.** Do NOT enter the home until you know it is safe, or have been given the green light to enter the area (See *STEP THREE* in this booklet). Try to retrieve the following items:
  - Important legal documents
  - Identification
  - Vital medicines
  - Eyeglasses and hearing aids
  - Credit cards
  - Cheque books and cheques
  - Insurance policies
  - Money
  - Jewellery
  - Photos and other items of sentimental value (particularly important for children).
- **Secure the property.** It's your responsibility to make sure the house is secured against further damage. If you rent, the

**CAUTION:**  
If fire has burned around a safe, do not attempt to open it unless it is cool to the touch on the outside.

landlord or property manager should be responsible for this. If you own the home, here's what to do:

- Board up broken windows and smashed doors.
- Cover holes in roof and walls.
- In the winter, drain water lines if the house won't be heated for awhile.

You can do these things yourself or call a contractor (See the Yellow Pages under "Contractors – General" or "Fire and Water Damage Restoration.") In some cases, the Fire Department will secure the property for you, or the municipal housing department will do it. Your insurance policy may pay reasonable expenses incurred in preserving insured property.

If your property is looted, contact the police immediately. Tell them what was stolen. This report may be needed to file an insurance claim for theft, distinct from any disaster damage claim.

- **Take care of your pets.** If a pet is lost, contact the SPCA or the local pound. Pets may have been injured in the disaster, and can suffer stress, too. If you have to move temporarily, take your pets with you if possible. Make sure they have plenty of food and water and get lots of exercise. If possible, continue with the same food type as a change in diet can cause an additional complication. Normally quiet and friendly cats and dogs may become aggressive or defensive, therefore pet owners need to take extra care and keep children safe.
- **Notify people if you move, even temporarily.** Be sure to give your new address to:
  - Post office
  - Banks
  - Schools
  - Newspapers and magazines you subscribe to
  - Credit card companies
  - Utility companies (hydro, gas, telephone)
  - Family and friends.