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Removing Smoke Smell

Even though the flames have been extinguished from the recent wild fire, the aftermath of the situation is still very prevalent and far from over. There are a lot of big picture items to deal with but also some of the underlying details, such as removing smoke odors in homes, vehicles, clothing, etc.

Fire creates two types of smoke damage – the visible soot and the invisible odor. The odor lingers due to tiny microscopic particles that cling to everything. Scented candles, perfumed aerosols, disinfectants, increasing ventilation, and even ozone generators can help temporarily but do not remove the smell permanently because the smoke particles are still present and imbedded even in the smallest of cracks and areas.

If the smoke odor is in your home, one of the most effective ways of ensuring removal is done correctly is to hire a professional fire restorer. (Ask your insurance agent for a referral.) They use a deodorizing ozone treatment process that breaks up the smoke molecules and a thermal fogging process for walls. However, hiring a fire restorer could be a very expensive option. Following are some other suggestions that can be helpful.

- Wash and scrub all exterior surfaces including walls, walks, decks, screens, etc.
- Wash and disinfect all interior walls and hard surfaces (including insides of drawers, cabinets and closets) with mild soap or other appropriate cleaning products.
- Have heating, ventilating, air conditioning units, and all ductwork professionally cleaned to remove soot, ash, and smoke residue. Change/clean filters at least once a month for the first year. This may also help minimize the smoke odors that can be generated from the ash and soot outside on the ground and in the vegetation when disturbed by air movement.
- Wash, dust or clean all household items, including knick-knacks.
- Have all carpets and drapes professionally cleaned. Upholstered furniture and mattresses may be cleaned with steam.
- Launder or dry clean all clothing. Research at Louisiana State University suggests clothes of cotton, polyester and polyester/cotton blends are most effectively treated using warm water with either a non-built liquid detergent (such as Era*) or a low phosphate powder detergent and a liquid chlorine bleach (such as All* and Clorox*). Check for smoke odor and wash again if needed. The smoke odor may set if you dry clothing in the dryer when they still smell. Dry cleaning has limited effectiveness but may be the only option depending on fiber content or dyes used for the fabric.

*Mention of specific product names do not imply endorsement but only clarification of product type.*