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Cleaning up After a Fire



According to the National Fire Protection Association, in 2016 there were 1,342,000 fires reported in the United States. Of those, 475,500 were structure fires that caused 2,950 deaths, 12,775 civilian injuries and \$7.9 billion in property damage. The NFPA calculates that a structure fire is reported every 66 seconds in the United States.

Contrary to what many people believe, there is more than one type of fire. There are three most prevalent types of fires and the type of fire determines which cleaning method or combination of methods will be most appropriate. The three types of fire that are most common are: protein fires, natural substance fires, and petroleum/synthetic fires. Protein fires are most commonly associated with kitchen fires and will leave behind a residue that is greasy, sticky and difficult to clean. Natural substance fires are caused by the burning of organic matter such as wood, paper, or cotton. The residue left behind is typically dry and powdery and will have an odor similar to a campfire. Petroleum/synthetic fires are caused by the burning of petroleum based products such as rubber, plastics or oil. These fires leave behind a residue that is oily, sticky and very difficult to clean.

In many of these fires, the fire starts and is contained to a certain area of the home or business. Even though containment eliminates the need for complete demolition and reconstruction of the structure, it is still vitally important to clean up the soot and residue left behind to properly restore the property to a pre-loss condition.

When it comes to cleaning a structure there are several different methods to remove the soot and residue that is left behind:

- **Dry Wipe** – this is an effective method to clean up after a natural substance fire. This is a very labor intensive method and requires the use of a chemical sponge, which is made of natural rubber. Despite its name, there are no chemicals in the sponges and the soot has a magnetic like attraction to the sponge. It is important to note that the sponge is used alone and no liquids are required.
- **HEPA Vacuuming** – this is an effective way to clean loose particulate matter and is typically used in conjunction with dry wiping. It is important to check the filter regularly and change it out when need be.
- **Wet Wipe** – this is an effective method to clean up after a protein or petroleum/synthetic fire. This is a very labor intensive method and requires the use of surfactants to clean. Surfactants help cut through the grease and oily residue that may be left behind.
- **Combination** – this method utilizes both dry and wet wiping. The goal is to get all the large, loose particulate matter cleaned and then come back and wet wipe all surfaces once the dry wiping is complete.
- **Media Blasting** – this is the most aggressive form of cleaning as it takes off a layer of the surface being cleaned. There are different types of media such as pecan shells, sand, soda, or dry ice. Typically this is used for cleaning masonry, structural framing and decking.

Safety is also an important aspect of fire clean up. It is possible for the soot in a petroleum/synthetic fire to be carcinogenic. The type of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) required is dependent on the project as every fire is different. It might require the use of Tyvek overalls, eye protection, gloves, respirators, hardhats or a combination of equipment.

If you find yourself in a fire damage situation, make sure to enlist the help of an experienced and certified restoration company to clean up any damage at the property. Until next time my friends, be prepared and stay safe.

Reference: National Fire Protection Association

September 2018

Events

September 3: Labor Day Office Closed
 September 6: ACA Luncheon
 September 11: SACA Luncheon
 September 19: AAFAME Expo
 September 19: SA BOMA Luncheon
 September 19: IIASA Luncheon
 September 20: SAABE
 September 20: Austin BOMA Luncheon
 September 21: IREM Bowling Tourn
 September 27: IWSA Luncheon
 September 27-29: TASA-TASB Convention

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1
2	3 Labor Day	4	5	6 ACA Luncheon	7	8
9	10	11 SACA Luncheon	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19 AAFAME Expo SABOMA Luncheon IIASA Luncheon	20 Austin BOMA Luncheon SAABE Luncheon	21 IREM Bowling	22
23 30	24	25	26	27 IWSA Luncheon	28 TASA-TASB Conference	29

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