

Damage ~ Fire

The treatment a fire-damaged garment or fabric needs depends on the kind of fire it was in. Wood, plastics, and other materials leave different chemicals in their soot and odors, and may react differently to cleaning treatments.

It is best to contact a professional fire restorer or dry cleaner to find out if items can be safely restored, and let the experts handle it.

They have special chemicals that remove smoke and soot particles that are not available for home use. There are a few things you can do at home to help restore your garments, but be careful—an item can be ruined by improper cleaning methods.

Soot and Smoke

- Do not attempt to wipe or rub away soot—the oily particles will be ground into the fabric and stain permanently. Take the garment outside and shake it as best as possible. If the item cannot be shaken (like a couch), avoid touching it until a professional can take a look at it.

- Larger, sturdier items (drapes, blankets, couches) can be gently vacuumed by holding the nozzle ¼ inch above the fabric. Do not use brush attachments or upright vacuuming as it could grind the soot back in.

Odor

- Do not use perfumed sprays or disinfectants to remove odor. They will only mask odor for a short while, and may interact chemically with smoke odor to create a new unpleasant smell.

- Hang damaged items outside, preferably in sunlight, for 4-8 hours to air out. If weather does not permit, hang items in a location that was not damaged by fire. Soot remains in the air of the home or building where the fire happened, and will redeposit on clothing.

- If airing out does not eliminate odor, contact professional fire restorers / dry cleaners and ask about “counteractants.” These chemicals, applied based on what material was burned in the fire, can help to break up smoke and odor particles in the fabric.

Cleaning methods

- Machine-washable clothing that was in a closed closet or drawer during a fire can sometimes be restored at home. Only attempt cleaning items with very mild damage; take dry-clean-only and heavily soiled items to a dry cleaner.

- Do not attempt to wash fabrics at home before they have been deodorized / aired out. If you cannot get rid of the odor, take the item to a dry cleaner or risk setting the smoke smell into the fabric permanently.

- For machine-washable items (cottons and polyesters), run through 5 regular wash cycles with a strong detergent, like Era, and warm water.

- Adding ½ cup white vinegar can help to eliminate odor. No difference may be seen after the first 2 washes, but repeated washing has been shown to significantly improve smoke damaged clothing.

- Do not put items in a dryer in between washes—this will set in stains and smoke odor. Hang outside or another location that was not damaged by fire.

- Some embellishments—even on washable items—may be permanently damaged and need replacing. Buttons, beaded trims, belt buckles, clasps etc may not show any change after multiple washings. GreenEarth solution is safe and gentle on these kinds of details, so take them to a cleaner to see if they can be restored.