



# Wildfire Preparation, Evacuation, and Recovery

A Resource Guide from Experienced Fire Attorneys

**Edelson**

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# A Resource Guide from Experienced Fire Attorneys

Wildfires can cause life-changing injuries and damage. If a wildfire has damaged your property or caused you to suffer physical or emotional injury, an experienced attorney can help you navigate your recovery.

The attorneys at Edelson PC are dedicated to advocating for wildfire victims and holding responsible parties accountable for the damage they have caused. Over the years, we have litigated against some of the biggest companies in the world and helped wildfire victims recover millions of dollars in compensation for their losses.

We created this guide to provide information to wildfire victims and families who live in high fire risk areas. It contains information related to wildfire preparation, wildfire recovery, and wildfire lawsuits, generally. It also contains information about how Edelson PC may be able to help you. If you have any questions about the information in this guide, please do not hesitate to contact us:

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# Wildfire Preparation



If you and your family live in an area where a wildfire may occur, good preparation could save your life. Below is a non-exhaustive list of actions you can take to be better prepared for a fire.

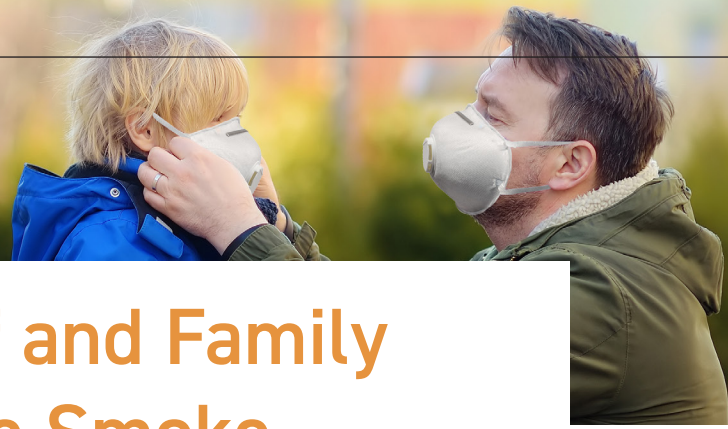
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- 1 | Sign up for local early alert systems to keep you informed of fire-related updates.
- 2 | Remove potential fuel sources, such as dead vegetation, surrounding your home.
- 3 | Put together a go bag with emergency supplies, including a cell phone charger, non-perishable food, personal toiletries, and enough clothing for several days.
- 4 | Understand evacuation routes and decide on a meeting place with your family.
- 5 | Keep the batteries fresh in your smoke detectors.
- 6 | Keep a working fire extinguisher in your home and know how to use it.
- 7 | Know how to shut off the natural gas, propane, or fuel oil to your home. If you need to evacuate, this will be an important task.
- 8 | Purchase glass cleaner and wipes for your car. Smoke residue can build up on surfaces like your dashboard and the inside of your windows. Keep some cleaning supplies in your car to help.
- 9 | Purchase N95 or P100 masks. These can be useful if you have to go outside when there is smoke.



# Staying Safe During a Wildfire and Evacuation Considerations





## Protect Yourself and Family from Wildfire Smoke

Smoke from a wildfire can hurt your eyes, irritate your nose and respiratory system, and worsen chronic lung and heart diseases, among other things. People with preexisting heart and lung conditions, older adults, children, and pregnant women may be more likely to be affected by smoke. It is important to take steps to reduce your risk from wildfire smoke. Below are a list of steps you can take to reduce the risk of adverse smoke exposure:

### **Check local air quality reports.**

Many communities publish reports on the local Air Quality Index. This information can sometimes be found during local news and health coverage as well as through weather apps on your smartphone.

### **Review local visibility guides.**

Some communities throughout the western United States monitor the levels of particulates in the air by how far they can see.

### **Keep indoor air as clean as possible.**

Local officials may advise you to stay indoors. If this happens it is good to keep doors and windows closed. Running the air conditioner with the fresh-air intake closed and a clean filter can prevent or lessen outdoor smoke from getting inside. Running an air purifier is another option if you have one. If it is too warm to stay indoors and you do not have an air conditioner, go to a designated shelter away from the area.

### **Avoid indoor activities that increase pollution inside.**

Cooking on a gas stove, using a fireplace, and burning candles can increase indoor pollution. Vacuuming also contributes to indoor air pollution by stirring up particles already inside your home.

### **Purchase N95 or P100 masks.**

N95 or P100 respirators can help protect your lungs from smoke or ash. Look for NIOSH (National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health) certification on the mask or packaging. A paper dust mask is not enough, as they are not designed to trap the small particles found in smoke.

### **Protect yourself while cleaning up after a fire.**

Cleaning up after a fire can expose you to ash and other products from a fire which could cause irritation and be dangerous to your health. Wear proper safety equipment and be careful around damaged structures.



# Wildfire Evacuation Considerations



## Precautionary or Voluntary Evacuations:

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An evacuation notice may be categorized as precautionary or voluntary when a fire has just started and there are early signs of danger. Pay attention to your surroundings as you may be the first to know if the situation changes for the worse in your area.

## Mandatory Evacuations and Immediate Threats:

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Get out fast. If your area has been listed under mandatory evacuation it means to get out of the area immediately. The longer you wait increases the changes that you may be trapped by the fire.

## When It's Time to Evacuate

- Gather your family, your pets, and your go bags.
- Remember the plan you created and assign everyone a role in your family's evacuation.
- Give your close neighbors a call to make sure they are aware of the evacuation.
- Close up your doors and windows.
- Turn off the AC, fans, and the gas or propane.
- Clear the immediate area around your home of flammable items like cushions, lawn furniture, propane grills.
- Position the cars so they are ready to leave.
- Let a friend or relative know you're leaving and where you are headed.
- Turn on the lights inside and outside to help make your house visible through smoke.
- Save your receipts during your evacuation.







## What should I do after evacuating from a fire?

### **Call your insurance company.**

Once you are safe it is a good idea to call your insurance company early to let them know you were impacted and will be gathering more information to provide. Important information you may also want to ask your insurance company in this initial conversation include:

- Request that they email you a copy of your insurance policy to review.
- What are the details of my policy for emergency housing or hotel accommodations?
- Does my policy include coverage for an emergency board up of the property? What is the process for fencing and securing the property? Are there restrictions or recommendations on who I can hire to help with this?
- Does my policy have a per diem amount for meals and evacuation expenses?

### **Find Temporary Accommodations.**

If you have been forced to evacuate, or your home is currently uninhabitable from fire related damage, you will need to find a place to stay. Check local news sources and resources for shelter options/ Review your insurance.

### **Keep your receipts.**

Keep track of your evacuation expenses as best you can. Digital pictures of receipts are often enough. Try to ensure they are clear and include information about the purchase and the date.

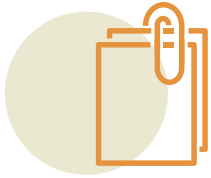
### **Treating that smoke smell on your clothes or in your car.**

The smell of smoke can be persistent on clothing and linens. Many have shared that Woolite has been particularly helpful in removing the smoke smell. Make sure to read the label carefully and follow the instructions. A professional detailing service or smoke removal service may be necessary.



# Recovering After A Wildfire





### **Document Everything.**

You should collect and save all documents related to the fire, including receipts for emergency expenses and medical records.



### **Take Photos and Videos of the Property Damage.**

Once it is safe to return to your property, take photos of the property damage starting at the street or address marker and include all sides of the building. If it is legal in your area, you may consider using a drone to document footage of the damage if one is accessible.



### **Make a List of Your Losses.**

Document a list of everything you and your family lost in the fire. An item that was destroyed or damaged in the fire may be covered by your insurance policy or recoverable as damages in a later litigation. Recent photos of rooms in your house or previous purchase receipts can be helpful in your documentation.



### **Understand Your Legal Options.**

Even if you are insured it is critical to understand your legal options after a wildfire. Fire victims too often discover that insurance proceeds are woefully inadequate to cover their losses. An experienced wildfire attorney can help you understand what damages are available to you and they can help you fight to recover the compensation you deserve.

## **General Resources**

FEMA App - Receive real-time alerts from the National Weather Service for up to five locations nationwide and access emergency safety tips.

InciWeb( <https://inciweb.nwgc.gov/>) - The Incident Information System is an interagency information management system which combines information from government agencies on wildfires, prescribed burns, and road closures.

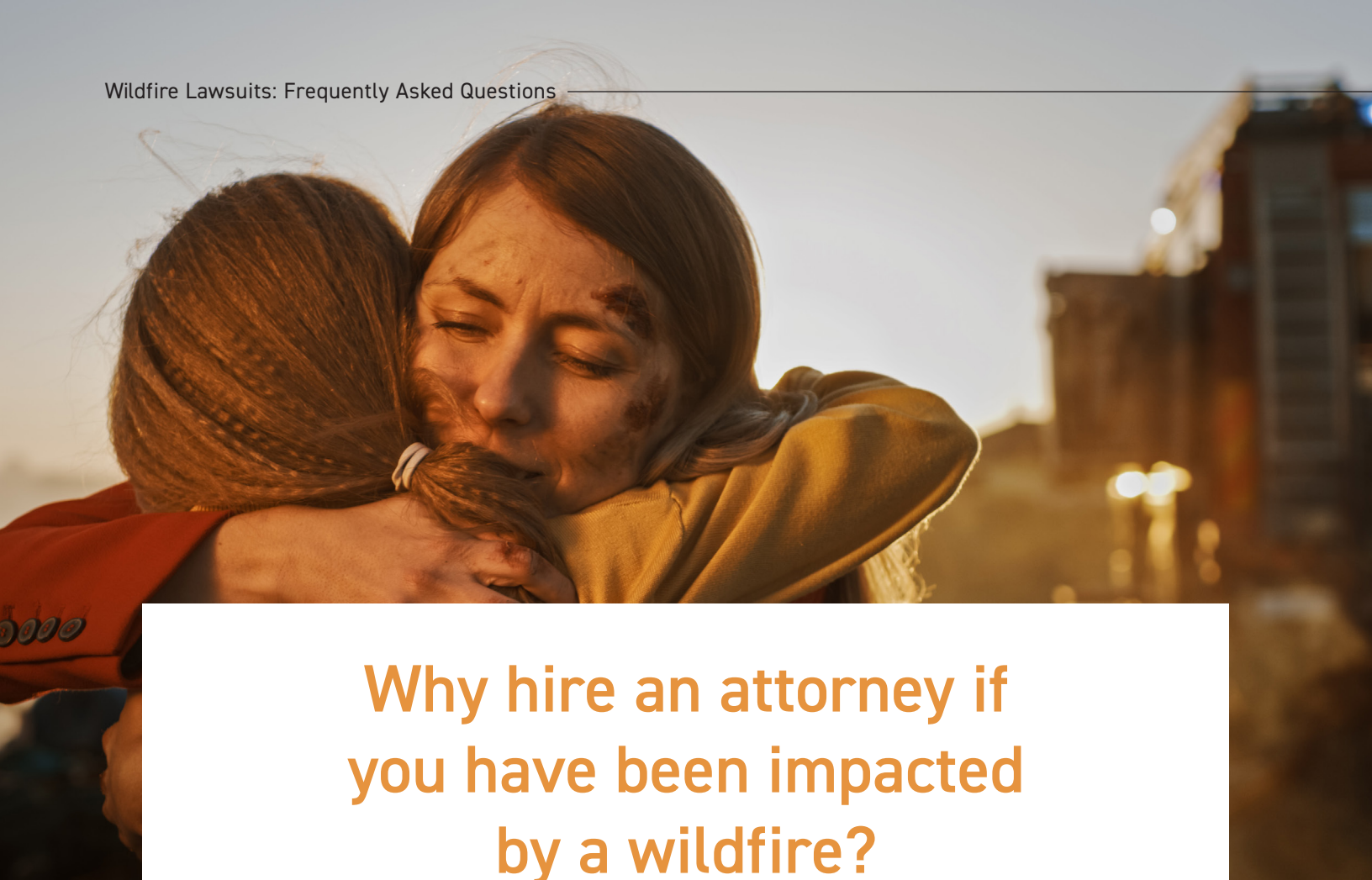
Humane society - The humane society is often allowed into evacuated areas before the general public. If you had to leave animals behind they may be able to help.

The American Red Cross has a Wildfire Relief guide to help navigate a diverse network of organizations and services to find help.





# Wildfire Lawsuits: Frequently Asked Questions



## Why hire an attorney if you have been impacted by a wildfire?

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Recovering compensation for your injuries and losses after a fire can be a complex, stressful, and adversarial process that lasts for years. Having experienced attorneys in your corner can be critical. They can help you understand what damages are available and they can help you fight to recover the compensation you deserve.

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The attorneys at Edelson PC have represented thousands of wildfire victims over the years, and have helped individuals and businesses recover millions of dollars for their losses, above and beyond money recovered from their insurance companies.





## I feel like I've lost everything. Where do I start?

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Once you and your family are safe, it is important to start taking steps to document your losses and to hold the responsible parties accountable for the damage they caused. Early diligence could help you recover substantially more compensation for your losses. Below is a list of steps you should consider taking immediately after a fire.

- 1 Contact your insurance company and file a claim. Take time to ask your insurance agent questions and call or email them many times, if needed, until you fully understand the details of your coverage, all relevant deadlines, and what information you need to provide them.
- 2 Hire an attorney. An attorney can help you understand what damages are available to you and how to hold the responsible parties accountable for your losses.
- 3 Save all receipts and invoices for purchases you were forced to make as a result of the fire. This includes receipts for emergency food, clothing, and other living expenses, such as hotel rooms.
- 4 Start making a list of your property loss. In your mind, go room by room. List the big, expensive items first, and then turn to the smaller items, itemizing both the type of property and its estimated value. This experience can seem daunting but it is important that you try. In our experience, a robust property list can help clients recover substantially more compensation.
- 5 Take care of yourself. The weeks and months after a fire can be overwhelming. Remember to find time to do things that bring you happiness.

## Why do I need a lawyer if I already have insurance?

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While having good insurance is important, the truth is that insurance rarely—if ever—covers the full extent of a wildfire victim's damages. Often, it doesn't even come close. There are many categories of damages, like emotional distress and income loss, that insurance policies rarely cover at all. And even for categories of damages that insurance companies do typically cover, like property loss, coverage often falls woefully short of a fire victim's true losses. Experienced wildfire attorneys can help understand what damages are available and fight to help you recover as much compensation as possible, above and beyond your insurance coverage.

## How long do wildfire lawsuits take and how much do I need to be involved?

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It depends. Sometimes lawsuits are resolved very quickly. Often, though, they will last for many years. That is especially true for wildfire lawsuits, which typically involve complex facts, the use of many experts, extensive litigation before a judge, and sometimes a trial.

Your involvement will depend on what stage a case is in. But generally speaking, after you sign a retention agreement hiring a law firm, your attorneys will handle the lion's share of the work. Your primary role will be to provide your attorneys with documents and information to help them build your case.

## What Wildfire Damages Could Be Recovered?

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There are typically many different types of damages available to wildfire victims. These may include, but are not limited to, personal property loss, real property loss, emotional distress, personal injury, income loss, business losses, evacuation costs, medical expenses, and punitive damages.





## About Edelson PC

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Edelson PC is nationally recognized as a leader in high-stakes plaintiffs' work. For example, our wildfire team has represented and assisted approximately 1,000 clients who lost homes and businesses to the 2018 Camp Fire in Paradise, California, and acted as counsel to a court-appointed member of PG&E Tort Claimants Committee. The work of our lawyers and staff in that fire helped lead to a \$13.5 billion settlement. Our team is additionally representing hundreds of families in Oregon who lost their homes in a number of 2020 fires across the state, along with a number of other fires across the American West. Our team of lawyers, paralegals, client relations specialists, and experts provide hands on and personal attention to each of our clients from the first days after the fire all the way through final resolution.

Overall, the cases we have litigated have resulted in settlements and verdicts totaling over \$20 billion. We have prosecuted some of the largest and most cutting-edge class actions, mass actions, and public client investigations and cases in recent years.

### **EXPERIENCED WILDFIRE ATTORNEYS**

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