

Wells and Wastewater After a Fire

Your well or septic system could be adversely affected by the fire, power outages, equipment failure from fire damage, or contamination of water supplies. Be prepared, and have plenty of bottled water available for drinking and cooking when you return home.

Wells

Visually inspect your well and other components of your water system for damage including melted wiring for pumps and the well head. If the well head has been damaged, temporarily cap or cover the well with a 5 gallon bucket to prevent contaminants from entering. If you find damage or contamination to your well or water system, do not drink the water and contact an appropriate contractor to repair the damage or treat your well.

If your water tastes or smells earthy, smoky or burnt, you may need to thoroughly flush your water lines. Loss of pressure and power can impact safety of your drinking water. When returning home, turn on a faucet in the household to see if water comes out. You should not hear any air being released from the faucet. The flow of water should be steady and uninterrupted. If you do hear air escaping from the faucet with water intermittently spurting out when it is turned on, that is an indication that the well and household plumbing had a loss of pressure and should be checked to make sure it is safe from bacteria.

If you have a cistern that was exposed to the fire, have the water in it tested before consuming.

If you have concerns about water safety, have your water tested. For more information about water testing, visit BoulderCountyWater.org; click on *Water Testing* for a list of labs that offer this service.

While awaiting results from your water testing, you can use your water for flushing toilets and it is reasonably safe to use in a shower or bath. Take care to avoid swallowing water. You should boil or disinfect water for drinking or cooking purposes and for washing dishes or other cooking utensils.

Septic Systems

When returning to your property, inspect the area where your septic system is located for signs of damage from fire and traffic from fire-fighting operations. If you feel your septic system may have been damaged, discontinue use until a licensed professional has inspected the system. The system may have been impacted if:

- Plastic piping above ground has melted.
- Evidence of vehicle traffic in the area of the system.
- The raised system was in the direct line of fire (i.e. grass on top is scorched).
- There is damage in the area where the pipes enter the home.

For information regarding location of your septic system please visit SepticSmart.org and click on *Check Septic Records*.



A list of licensed septic system inspectors can be found at SepticSmart.org; click on *Licensed Professionals* in the right column.

Here are some considerations for resuming use of your septic system:

- Continue to use your system if there are no signs of damage.
- Discontinue flushing or using sinks if drains are backing up, your lift station has no power, or your system has surfacing effluent in the soil treatment area. If the system is malfunctioning contact Boulder County Public Health, for guidance and instruction regarding repair and restoration of the system.

If you cannot flush toilets:

- Use one of the portable toilets provided.
- Use a portable chemical or camping toilet, which can be purchased from a recreational vehicle or camping equipment supplier.
- Use a National Sanitation Foundation (NSF)-approved composting toilet, which can be purchased from a plumbing or ecological products supplier.

Personal Hygiene

- Wash your hands often, or use disposable wipes or hand sanitizer.
- Use disposable utensils and dishes.
- Have extra trash bags and disposable wipes available.

For additional fire recovery information, visit ColdSpringsFireRecovery.org