

After the Fire: Working or Living in the Disaster Zone

Returning to your home or workplace after a wildfire evacuation is extraordinarily hard. When it's deemed safe to return to an evacuation zone, initially your focus may be on clean-up and other logistics. You also need to take care of yourself physically and emotionally.

Wildfires cause physical damage and emotional distress. Repeated exposure to a disaster zone may complicate your emotional recovery process and mental wellbeing.

Reactions to Trauma

Many people who have experienced trauma or have repeated exposure to a disaster zone may find themselves asking "Why did this happen?". This can be especially difficult if your workplace or home was damaged or destroyed in a wildfire, and others around you were not. It might be helpful to remember:

- Everyone who was evacuated, witnessed, or impacted by the wildfire directly is likely to have an emotional response. Your reaction might be immediate or delayed.
- Feelings of sadness, grief, and anger about what happened are reactions many people will experience. You may feel guilty that you should have done something differently.
- Most people feel anxious about their personal safety, the safety of their family, friends, and co-workers when returning to a disaster zone. If you're living or working in a disaster zone, you may continue to feel hyperalert and fearful.

Coping with Trauma

It is important to know that you will likely have an emotional, physical, or cognitive response. Everyone has different needs and different ways of coping. Acknowledging your feelings and recognizing your experience will help you move forward. Some initial steps you can take also include:

- Take it one day at a time and pace yourself. Plan a reasonable amount of clean-up or time in the disaster zone each day.
- Take care of yourself physically. Eat a well-balanced diet and drink plenty of water.

- Try to get enough rest and maintain some type of normal routine.
- Be aware of messages you are giving yourself. You are not ‘falling apart’ or ‘weak’; you are experiencing an emotional response to a traumatic event.
- Talk about your feelings with co-workers, family, and friends. Let others know what you need from them, and accept support.

Seeking Support

Give yourself time to heal but do not hesitate to reach out for professional support if you find yourself experiencing:

- Prolonged anxiety, depression, extreme hopelessness, substance abuse, or suicidal thoughts.
- Impaired ability to complete your job functions or other activities in your daily life.

It's healthy to reach out for professional support if you need it.

Canopy has counselors available 24/7 at 800-433-2320.