

# FREMONT COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT



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## REMOVING SMOKE ODOR FROM A HOME

To remove the smell permanently, you must remove the source of the problem. The smoke particles must be removed by cleaning since smoke particles tend to get into the smallest cracks and areas. Ventilation can help to remove some of the smell, but it actually only dilutes the odor and does not remove the smell permanently.

- Wash, and scrub all exterior surfaces including walls, walks, drives, decks, windows, and deck screens, etc.
- Wash and disinfect all interior walls and hard surfaces with mild soap or other appropriate cleaning solutions or products, and rinse thoroughly. Don't forget inside cabinets, drawers, and closets.
- Launder or dry clean all clothing.
- Wash, dust, or otherwise clean all household items, including knick-knacks.
- Disinfect and deodorize all carpets, window coverings, upholstered furniture, and mattresses with steam or other appropriate equipment.
- Upholstery, curtains, etc. can be spray-treated with deodorizing products available at most supermarkets, but do not use odor-masking sprays.
- Have heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning units and all ductwork professionally cleaned to remove soot, ash, and smoke residue. Change filters when you first return to the premises and at least once a month for the first year.
- If aerial fire retardant or firefighting foam residue is present on the house and/or automobiles, use a mild detergent and brushes to scrub and dilute the dried residue and flush it from the surfaces; rinse with clean water. A follow-up with pressure washing may be beneficial but will not replace scrubbing to remove the residue.
- Ash and soot on the ground and vegetation in the vicinity will continue to generate smoke odors and airborne particles when disturbed by air movement. Until the ash and soot are diluted and absorbed by the environment, indoor mechanical air filtration may help minimize the uncomfortable and potentially health-threatening impact of these pollutants.
- Keep in mind, though, that if the smoke odor has permeated into your carpets, draperies, furnishings, etc., there may be little that can be done to eliminate the smoke odor unless these items are removed or replaced.
- There are commercial companies that specialize in remediation after an event such as a fire or flooding.

Products that may help eliminate odors:

- **Vinegar.** White vinegar cuts through odors naturally. Try wiping down furniture, washable walls, floors, etc. with white vinegar. Also, try placing several bowls of vinegar around the room with the smoke damage, leaving them there for several days. If you can't stand the smell of vinegar, try mixing a bit of lavender oil into the bowls to help cut the odor of the vinegar.
- **Baking Soda.** Baking soda is another natural odor-absorber. Try sprinkling liberal amounts of baking soda over furniture, floors, etc. Leave a few bowls of baking soda around the room for several days to help absorb the odors.
- **Febreze.** Febreze, a popular odor-reducing product sold in many stores, uses a chemical compound called cyclodextrin, a sugar-like substance that absorbs odors. Spraying the area down with Febreze may help to reduce the smoke odor.
- **Activated Charcoal.** This product, often used as a detoxifying agent, is also a natural odor absorbent. Placing bowls of activated charcoal (powdered form) around your room may help to absorb the smoke odors.
- **Fresh Air.** In the warmer weather, leave your windows and doors open as much as possible. Fresh air will eventually dissipate the smell of smoke.
- **Ozone Generators.** There are products on the market known as ozone generators that may help in reducing or even eliminating smoke odor from your house. Remember, though, that these expensive products, while effective in reducing the odor, will not eliminate it completely if the odor has permeated the carpets, draperies, furnishings, etc. An ozone generator should not be used while you are in the house.
- **Commercial Restoration Companies.** There are commercial companies that specialize in remediation and restoration after an event such as a fire or flooding.

Getting the smoke smell out of clothing can be difficult. Some suggest using 1 cup of vinegar in the wash cycle, along with the usual detergent. One wash may not remove the smoke odor, so check for smoke odor. If the odor is still present, wash again using the same process. Smell the items each time after they are washed. If they still smell like smoke, wash them until the odor is gone. If you dry them in a dryer when they smell like smoke, you may set the odor in the clothing.