

# CONTENTS SOLUTIONS

THE GO-TO GUIDE FOR PERSONAL PROPERTY RESTORATION

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## HIDDEN CHALLENGES OF SMOKE REMEDIATION

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# HIDDEN CHALLENGES OF SMOKE REMEDIATION

Wood smoke can contain sulfur dioxide, carbon, methane, formaldehyde, benzene, various acids and VOCs (Volatile Organic Compounds). These are all hard on humans, but not surprisingly they are potentially damaging to most everything else they touch.

Burning textiles, plastics, food, paint and even plaster release toxic gases of their own (not to mention noxious odors).

Smoke may seem to dissipate as soon as you open windows and doors, but the particulates that are left behind coat everything with a complex mixture of destructive chemicals and smells. When wood gets hot, the “pores” open and any gasses that are flowing through the home or office penetrate the openings and wedge themselves into the furniture. When that happens the contents pros have to reach deep into their repertoire in order to locate the exact balance of tools and technology that won't further damage the tables, chairs, couches, cabinets and other wood textures, but will remove the odors.

Computers and other fragile electronics are especially vulnerable to the high humidity (after a fire is put out) mixed with smoke particulates. The air itself is particularly acidic and when those acids waft in through computer ports, television speakers, cell phone apertures and other nooks and crannies, it starts to corrode delicate components.

The same soot and moisture coatings can become even more problematic if a worker or homeowner touches an object. Fingerprints can etch themselves into glass, expensive picture frames, photographs and even artworks (a combination of oils in the skin and the acids in the particulates). That is why the contents pros often wear nitrile gloves when handling crystal,

porcelain, mirrors and other susceptible surfaces during a fire restoration.

In fact it is quite common to see the front line team going through the home or office upon arrival, coating chrome and other soft metals with an easily removed grease or oil to protect them from the very air that surrounds them. The moisture and soot combination can actually pit, corrode or permanently stain such metal exteriors (even chrome fixtures in bathrooms, breakrooms and meeting rooms).

Some items are simply not restorable after a fire. For example a melted and distorted big screen TV, or charred fabric (although in some cases burned or torn fabric can be re-woven if the value of the item justifies it). Often speed is essential in the process of restoring a client's valuables after a fire. As we mentioned, electronic components are particularly vulnerable to smoke particulates mixed with high humidity – the resulting acid can permanently damage such devices in as little as 72 hours. When that occurs, even the contents pros can't save them.

But most of the items that are covered in soot or have a strong smoke odor are the very reason contents professionals are so popular with agents, adjusters and property managers.

The contents pros restore so you don't have to replace, which saves the carriers considerable sums – making the adjuster look very good to his/her managers, and helping the agent get policy renewals because the home owners have received their valuables returned in pre-loss condition and are grateful that the insurance professionals brought in a team that produced outstanding results.



## WHEN SOOT SPONGES DON'T WORK

Soot sponges are terrific for many assignments, but they don't work well on some surfaces and for some soot removal tasks. They don't work well on oil or acrylic paint. They are a disaster for cleaning up greasy soot from protein fires. But some uninformed cleaning workers will try them anyway because they have never been shown the correct tools and techniques.

But any professional knows that ordinary sponges, microfiber cloth and grease-cutting solutions are a far better combination for such projects. Even then a trained contents manager must see to it that the proper compounds are used (we have seen well meaning, but untrained workers remove the reflective coating from mirrors with ordinary household chemicals).

Still it is imperative to get all the soot and grime off fragile surfaces to prevent staining, out of electronics and away from chrome and other soft metals to prevent corrosion. Time is of the essence and a quick wipe down of a faucet or refrigerator door handle can mean the difference between permanent staining and pitting – or returning the same items in pre-loss condition.

The contents pros are fast, efficient and know what they are doing – and when the totals are all added up, they don't “cost”, they save on every job.

# SOOT SPONGES AMAZING TOOLS



Soot sponges, sometimes also referred to as “dry chemical sponges” don’t actually have any chemicals in them. They are the preferred tool for removing loose soot and smoke from latex painted walls and ceilings, “popcorn” or “blown” textured ceilings, and even acoustical tile and many other hard surfaces.

The contents specialists always start with the ceiling and work down because tiny bits of the sponge itself as well as other debris will fall as the area is cleaned. Some contractors will use the sponge until its pores become clogged, then will cut away the surface to continue cleaning.

Others prefer to use new sponges as the surface of the old one becomes unserviceable. Eventually the sponge (and the particulates that fall from it) become “gummy” and they are discarded. Untrained personnel begin with the walls (ignoring the ceiling) and neglect to change out the soot sponges, making the jobs

considerably more labor intensive (and more expensive).

Soot sponges are notorious for “crumbling” into particles as they are used – contents pros vacuum as they go. Untrained workers often just track through the debris, thinking that the end of the job is the best time to perform a “clean up” of all the fallen fragments. This results in unnecessary cross contamination and adds even more time and effort (not to mention price) on any given fire and smoke remediation job.

Even so small a procedure can end up costing the carrier significant sums, simply due to a lack of training. Trained specialists negotiate with the adjuster before beginning any work, so they don’t waste time and money on procedures that will misuse both.

Real contents pros save on every job – not just by restoring instead of replacing. But by cutting down on work hours and preventable re-cleaning as well.

# THE WEIRD WAYS OF THE CONTENTS PROS

Picture this – there had been a fire in a historic building. Art had been exposed to such heat that some of the paintings actually bubbled on the canvas, then cooled, with flakes falling to the floor as they contracted. Burned and scorched sconces and wall coverings were cracked and useless.

Spanish tiles had been shattered by firemen’s boots and the metal fittings on hoses. An antique rug now had scorch marks and holes from falling embers.

But none of it was thrown away. The contents pros gathered the flakes from the painting and put them in a small glassine bag that prevented any further damage, then sent them to the art conservator who was to restore the paintings (by her request).

The sconces were salvaged in order to act as bases for the creation of new ones.

The Spanish tiles were carefully packed and preserved, even though there was no hope of restoring them. They were to act as standards for those who were to find replacements. And with the adjuster’s and home owner’s agreement, the torn and burned antique rug was sent to a specialist to be restored – that one piece alone, we are told, saved the carrier over \$20,000.

Some adjusters (who don’t know them) might have thought the workers were wasting time gathering up flakes of paint, broken tiles, burned plaster and torn up rugs. Those who do know them have long come to trust the contents pros’ “weird ways.”



# CROSS CONTAMINATION CAN BE A BEAR

After a fire, cross contamination can be a real challenge. The contents specialists will often “cocoon” unaffected furniture, carpets and other large items in plastic, sealed with painter’s tape. They will also create “zipper doors” that act as “airlocks” between affected and unaffected areas.

Smoke impregnated items and ones that are charred or burned, will be removed early in the process to help keep the smoke odors away from clean items and rooms. Some adjusters and agents have remarked at the difference removing a few items from the home or office can make.

The contents pros always begin by looking at the source of the fire and the most smoke contaminated items. By keeping the contamination away from clean areas, huge amounts of time, effort and money are saved on practically every smoke remediation job.



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