

TECHNICIAN'S ADVISORY

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The Technicians' Advisory column is intended to add to a technician's existing knowledge base and offer alternative solutions to specific issues.

It is not intended as a definitive tutorial, nor to imply the recommendation of a particular methodology, since all situations must be assessed individually and any action taken is entirely the responsibility of the technician or organisation involved.

REMOVING FIRE RESIDUES

Fast burning fires, smouldering fires. Fires involving plastic, or wood or textiles. Persistent odours. At the end of the incident we are asked to deal with the residue.

It has contaminated everything and we are asked if it can be removed. We are asked if we can remove the odours.

We play an important part in reducing the environmental impact of fire damage events. By successfully restoring contents goods we are reducing the amount that goes to landfill, or for re-cycling. As long as our customers have their items returned to pre-incident condition we are able to demonstrate a very cost effective solution.

ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS

What are the key elements to successful fire damage restoration?

The most important starting point is to roughly classify the fire and the type of residue we have to deal with. Take careful note of how loose the residue is, and if the odour is strong and persistent.

As you will already know some loose fire residues can look dark and may indeed be a heavy thick layer, but even in these cases they can be relatively easy to remove. Other residues are more difficult.

Note whether the odour is persistent. Ask yourself, "Has it been a smouldering fire, starved of oxygen?" These fires typically produce wet greasy odours and a type of staining which is hard to remove. With slow burning fires the combustion has been less complete and the smoke produced contains more aerosols, which are deposited on surfaces as a greasy, sometimes brown, film. These are the fires that can produce very strong persistent odours.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRIAGE

Your chances of restoring contents items will be greater if you make an initial triage assessment to identify any items that are at risk of secondary damage. Prompt action then to prevent this damage will increase your success. During this inspection note the different levels of contamination and the affect this may have on the restorability of the items affected. For example, note that books on the upper

shelves of a bookcase may be far more heavily contaminated than those on the lower shelves. They need to be assessed and dealt with separately.

Remember that books can often be restored completely, CDs and DVDs may need opening up and the cases cleaned or replaced (the cases are inexpensive) and the discs washed. Remember that soft toys can usually be laundered, and that ultrasonic cleaning can make cost effective the cleaning of small items that would otherwise be uneconomic. Specialist support may be needed to restore some items.

VALUE OF TEST PROCESSING

The last thing you want to happen is to carry out a large amount of work and for this to be rejected by the owner. It is perfectly possible to remove fire residues successfully from a wide range of materials, and in many cases you will be able to predict the result in advance. However, if you have any doubts, then test process a small sample and make sure the result is satisfactory before proceeding with the whole batch.

All contents items should be carefully considered for restoration. To be able to make this assessment you need to have an idea of the replacement cost. In some cases you will need to check with the owner or seek specialist advice. An example of when this could be required is with collectibles, where the market value can be much higher than expected.

THE BDMA TRAINING AND REFERENCE MANUAL

The manual contains a useful section describing a variety of items and materials with their vulnerabilities and restoration challenges. You can self-study the section, using its review questions to help you remember the points.

Being skilled and able to remove fire residues from a wide variety of contents items is an essential part of our offering to our customers. Simply listing and dumping general contents is not appropriate. It is our responsibility, if we are involved in fire damage restoration, to ensure that our service includes a wide range of competencies in removing fire residues.