

# RECOVERING AFTER A NATURAL DISASTER

## KEY CONTACTS

### In an emergency: 000

**SES:** 132 500

**13 HEALTH:** 13 43 25 84

**Energex:** 13 62 62 (south east Queensland)

**Ergon:** 13 22 96 (all other Queensland areas)

**Community Recovery Hotline:** 1800 173 349

**Workplace, Health and Safety Queensland:**  
1300 362 128

### For more information:

- Tune in to local radio
- Check the QFES social media pages
- Download the self-recovery app

### Visit:

- [qld.gov.au/getready](http://qld.gov.au/getready)
- [ruralfire.qld.gov.au](http://ruralfire.qld.gov.au)
- [qfes.qld.gov.au](http://qfes.qld.gov.au)

## CLEANING UP AFTER A DISASTER

**I am elderly/disabled and I have no family or friends who are able to assist me. Who can help me clean up debris etc. from the disaster?**

You can contact your local Council or community associations such as Rotary, Red Cross, Apex, Salvation Army or Lions. Home Assist Secure can also assist communities. This service can be contacted through the Department of Housing. You can also search the internet for volunteers in your area.

**My house is uninhabitable and I have been living elsewhere. What can I do?**

Visit [disaster.qld.gov.au](http://disaster.qld.gov.au) to see the details of any evacuation centres nearby or call the Community Recovery Hotline on 1800 173 349 for advice.

## ASBESTOS SAFETY

**What do I do if I have or think I have asbestos?**

Properties built before 1990 are likely to contain asbestos containing materials, which can appear in many different forms. Do not attempt to remove this material yourself and do not disturb or break it as asbestos fibres may be released.

If you think there may be asbestos in your home, call your local council or Workplace Health and Safety Queensland on 1300 362 128 or 13 QGOV (13 7468) for advice.

**Can I get a list of licensed Asbestos removal or demolition contractors?**

Specialists who remove asbestos are licensed by Workplace Health and Safety Queensland.

For a list of licensed asbestos removalists visit [www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/injury-prevention-safety/asbestos/asbestos-removal-and-licensing/which-businesses-are-licensed-to-remove-asbestos-in-queensland](http://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/injury-prevention-safety/asbestos/asbestos-removal-and-licensing/which-businesses-are-licensed-to-remove-asbestos-in-queensland)

## TREATED TIMBER SAFETY

**What do I do if I am cleaning up ash from treated timber?**

If cleaning up areas where copper chrome arsenate (CCA) treated timber has been burned, be aware that it can pose a health risk if only a few grams are swallowed or inhaled.

It is not possible to tell if ash contains arsenic just by looking at it, so you should treat the ash as containing copper, chromium and arsenic. Wear personal protective clothing while cleaning up and keep children and animals away from the area. Moisten the ash before moving it and double-bag and seal it for disposal in landfill.

Call 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84) at any time for more information.

## ELECTRICAL SAFETY

**How do I know if my electrical appliances are safe?**

If a house or business has been damaged, electrical equipment, wiring and appliances may have been affected. Using water damaged equipment can result in electric shocks and fires.

The Electrical Safety Office recommends disposing of small household electrical items such as kettles and toasters, rather than risking an accident. A licensed electrician should inspect any larger appliances such as televisions and refrigerators which may have been in contact with water.

Master Electricians Australia (1300 889 198) will have a list of contractors who have made themselves available to the community.

For more information, Contact Energex (13 12 53 or [www.energex.com.au/safety](http://www.energex.com.au/safety)) for south east Queensland or Ergon Energy in other areas of Queensland (13 16 70 or [www.ergon.com.au](http://www.ergon.com.au))

Homeowners can also contact the Electrical Safety Office (1300 362 128 or [www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/electricalsafety](http://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/electricalsafety)) for more information.

### **We have power on now in some/all of the house, but we can smell burning. Is it okay to keep the power running?**

To ensure safety it is advisable to turn the power off and contact your electricity supplier.

### **What do I do if I come across down powerlines?**

Beware of fallen powerlines and trees, damaged buildings and flooded watercourses.

For powerlines down phone Energex on 13 19 62 (south east Queensland) or Ergon Energy on 13 16 70 (all other areas in Queensland).

## **WATER AND WASTE SAFETY**

### **How do I make my rainwater tank safe?**

If your rainwater tank was not disconnected before the fire, pipes should be disconnected or redirected as soon as it is safe to do so.

Your roof and gutters will need to be cleaned thoroughly (do not use a pressure washer if you have an asbestos roof), and rainwater pipes can then be reconnected. If you have a first-flush device, ensure it is empty and in good working order.

If it has rained since the bushfire, and collection pipes were connected, it is likely that ash and other contaminants will have flowed into the tank. In most cases, this will mean the tank needs to be drained and cleaned, and will need to be re-filled using a water source that is safe for drinking. As this work can be hazardous, the QBCC encourages the use of suitably qualified contractors.

If you notice any change in the quality of water (including colour, cloudiness or smell), stop using the water immediately and contact Queensland Health on 13 HEALTH (13 432 584) for further advice. You may also wish to contact your local council to arrange water testing.

### **What should I do if I have an on-site sewerage facility?**

If your property has been directly affected by fire, there are a number of steps you should take to ensure safety relating to your on-site sewerage facility.

Firstly, the area where your facility is installed should be roped off, as the tanks may be damaged from fire and could lead to falls.

If your facility has failed or been inundated with water from fire-fighting efforts, it could lead to sewage backing up in the system. If your home is contaminated, abandon the building until it can be thoroughly cleaned and sanitised. You should avoid flushing disinfectants down the drain, as these can impact on the operation of the facility.

You should also reduce water use until you have had the system inspected by an appropriate licensee, and repaired if necessary.

## **STARTING REPAIR WORK**

### **As a homeowner getting repair work done, does there need to be a contract in place?**

Yes. A contract is a legal requirement for all work valued over \$3,300. It is also strongly recommended to enter into a contract for work valued at less than \$3,300, but this is not a legal requirement.

You should confirm that your contractor holds the appropriate licence for the work being performed. A licence check can be carried out at [www.qbcc.qld.gov.au](http://www.qbcc.qld.gov.au) or ring QBCC on 139 333.

### **What must be included in the building contract?**

Make sure the work that has been agreed to is described fully in the contract. This will help to prevent any misunderstandings and minimise the risk of potential disputes between you and your builder. Any variations to the contract should be in writing, signed by both you and your builder, and attached to the contract. Variations should not only describe the work, but also record any agreed price changes.

A contract must:

- be signed and dated by you and your builder
- contain your name and your builder's name
- contain the site address
- contain the builder's licence details
- state the start and completion times
- state the payment arrangements
- have the plans and specifications attached
- contain the statutory warranties, and
- display the total contract price.

### **Should I get a written quote from builders?**

Insurers will either recommend obtaining at least two written quotes or will arrange quotes themselves. Talk to your insurer.

### **If repairing an existing structure such as a veranda or pergola, do I need to have a building approval?**

It will depend on the nature and extent of the work being undertaken. To ensure your responsibilities as a property owner or contractor have been met, it is recommended that you contact your local council.

## How do I find a licensed builder or contractor?

The QBCC has a unique search facility on its website ([www.qbcc.qld.gov.au](http://www.qbcc.qld.gov.au)), the Find a Local Contractor directory.

The directory allows you to choose a category of building work and then select a kilometre radius from a postcode. This will provide you with a list of local contractors who may be able to help with repair work.

If a contractor has given you a quote, you should also ask to see their QBCC licence or obtain their QBCC licence number which you can check on the QBCC website to ensure they are licensed for the work they are quoting for.

A tradesperson must be licensed for any building work valued at over \$3300.

You can carry out a licence search at [www.qbcc.qld.gov.au](http://www.qbcc.qld.gov.au) or call QBCC on 139 333.

## Who should I call if I have erosion issues?

You need to contact an appropriate tradesperson for repairs. Depending on the extent of the damage, this should either be a licensed Structural Landscaper or Builder. You may also need the services of an engineer.

Board of Professional Engineers Queensland -  
(07) 3198 0000 or [www.bpeq.qld.gov.au](http://www.bpeq.qld.gov.au)

## INSURANCE

### What disasters will my insurance cover? Will it cover erosion?

Each insurance policy is different depending on a variety of factors, such as the location of the insured property and the insurer issuing the policy. It is important for the claimant to read the policy and make sure it covers all of their requirements. If you are unsure, contact your insurer as they can provide answers specific to the policy and you.

### What does contents insurance cover?

This would need to be confirmed with your insurer, however contents insurance generally covers items contained in the home such as furniture, clothing and electrical goods.

### What happens if I'm not insured?

Uninsured people may be able to access financial assistance through the Queensland Government Department of Communities. Assistance is subject to an income and assets test. Call the Community Recovery Hotline on 1800 173 349 for more information.

## What do I do if I am having problems with my insurer?

If you are unhappy with an insurance assessment or service, you will need to read your insurance contract and then talk directly to the company to try to resolve the problem.

For more information claimants can contact:  
Insurance Council of Australia on 1300 728 228.

Financial Ombudsman Service on 1300 78 08 08 or  
[info@fos.org.au](mailto:info@fos.org.au), or visit [www.fos.org.au](http://www.fos.org.au)

## Once I have gone through the insurance evaluation process, how do I know if the builder is doing the right thing?

Your contractor should present you with a written contract and explain how and when they intend to do the work. If you have any concerns about the conduct of your contractor, contact the QBCC on 139 333.

## Is QBCC Insurance payable on repair work?

Yes. Licensed contractors must obtain Home Warranty Insurance on all residential construction work over \$3,300 in value. See [www.qbcc.qld.gov.au](http://www.qbcc.qld.gov.au) for more details.

## What does QBCC insurance cover?

The QBCC administers the Home Warranty Scheme which protects consumers against loss arising from defective or incomplete building work (Home Warranty Insurance). This insurance covers incomplete building work due to the insolvency, disappearance, or death of a builder. It also covers defective building work that comes to light after completion of the building work and that the contractor refuses to rectify, and subsidence/settlement.

The Scheme provides cover for 6.5 years if a licensed contractor performs the work, which commences from the date of payment of the insurance premium, or the date of signing the contract (whichever is earlier).

For more information on the scheme's inclusions, visit [www.qbcc.qld.gov.au/contractor-insurance-requirements/about-home-warranty-insurance](http://www.qbcc.qld.gov.au/contractor-insurance-requirements/about-home-warranty-insurance)

## WASTE REMOVAL

### What can I do with all the rubbish/debris left from a disaster?

Residents should take green waste to their local transfer station.

Other waste disposal options such as kerbside collections will usually be organised for disaster affected areas. Homeowners will need to contact their local council for suburb specific and current information.