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My Firearm Is Fire-damaged. What Do I Do Now?

by Sara Turnbull | Nov 29, 2018 | Doug Turnbull, FAQ, Firearm Restoration, Firearm Safety, Interviews, Restoration Resources, Shoot History, Turnbull Restoration & Manufacturing Blog | 28 comments



Photo: Core-Vens Insurance

Fires are one of the most devastating things that can happen to our families and our homes. When the fire has died down and it's time to sort through the ashes, what do you do with your fire-damaged firearms?

We get a lot of emails and phone calls from people who've had guns go through a fire. Questions like what to do immediately after a fire, if a firearm is safe to shoot, how much it would cost to restore, and how to deal with insurance. We asked **Doug Turnbull** to answer some of your most frequently asked questions.

What's the first thing you should do after your firearm's been in a fire?

As soon as you're able, you need to get your firearms in a bath to get the soot and ash off and prevent rust damage. Either use a bathtub, or create one from 4 x 8 sheets of plywood and plastic sheeting. Then add ½ cup Tide detergent and 3 pounds baking soda to about 5 gallons of warm water. You can add more baking soda if you need it; you really can't overdo it with the baking soda. Put the whole firearm in—

including the wood and scope—and use a cloth to wipe the soot and particulate off. They don't need to soak in the bath, just get a good wipe down to make sure all of the acid from the soot and smoke has been neutralized. Remove them from the bath and rinse. Then dry and oil your firearms. This process will keep the smoke and soot from rusting your firearm, as well as removing the smoke smell.

A few years back a customer of ours had a big fire at his place. The fire was on a Wednesday night, and on Saturday we went down and started dealing with the firearms. He had hundreds in his collection. We created 4 x 8 plywood baths and threw 8 guns in at a time. We were able to save 90% of the firearms in his collection. If he had just oiled them and left them sitting on the back porch, they would have kept rusting and getting worse and worse.

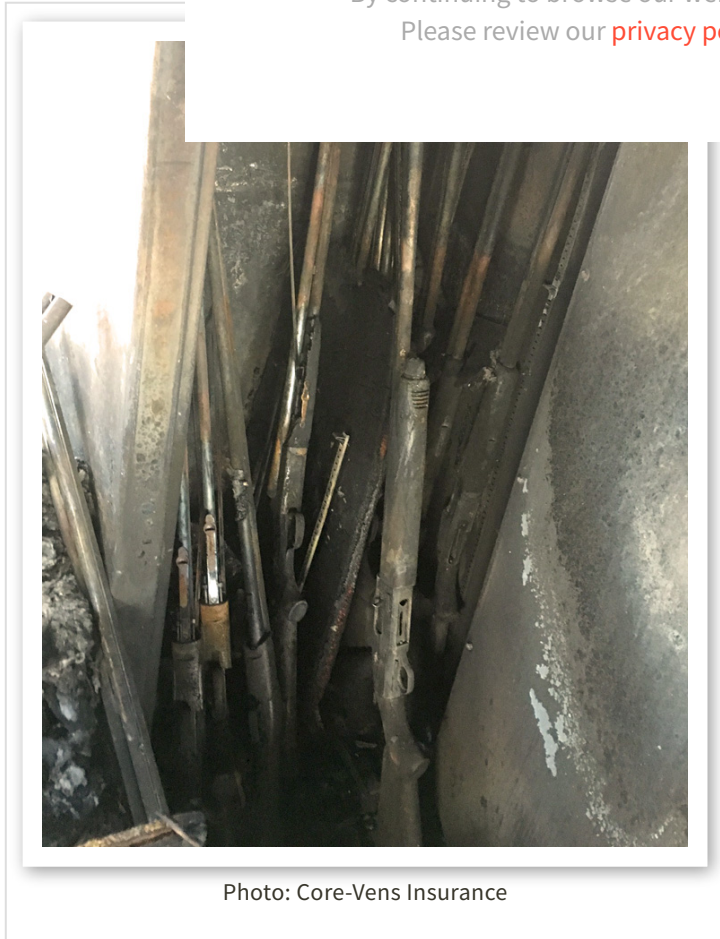


Photo: Core-Vens Insurance

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How do I know if my firearm is safe to shoot?

Play it safe: After your firearms have been in a fire, bring them to a gun shop, or mail them to us to take a look at. You never know what sort of internal damage has taken place during the fire. We offer free quoting for restoration and repair work, and can disassemble, clean, and reassemble your firearm for a reasonable rate. Send us an email or give us a call to find out how much it would cost to clean your particular model.

Can I tell if something's "too far gone", or is it fixable for me?

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Here are a few tell-tale signs:

- Warping
- Singed or burned-off wood
- Melted plastic
- Pitting or scaliness in the bluing
- After cleaning any bluing is completely removed

After cleaning if you're unsure if it can be saved feel free to get in touch with us or your local gun shop for an expert opinion. We can often tell from photographs if it'll be possible to save. When that's insufficient we'll ask you to send it in for free quoting so we can get a better look at it. It's always best to get your firearms in a bath if you think there's the possibility they could be saved.



This revolver has been through a fire and left to rust and degrade. You can see examples of what Doug refers to as "scaliness" on the barrel. Normally this firearm would be too far gone to restore, but we were looking for a challenge! To fully restore this revolver we had to replace almost everything on it. While it makes a beautiful example, this sort of in-depth work isn't something we regularly take on.

How much does it cost to restore a fire-damaged firearm?

Restorations vary greatly depending on what sort of work needs to be done and what sort of firearm we're dealing with. [We recommend calling or emailing](#) to find

out what a “ballpark” guess is for your project. From there, we always recommend [sending your firearm in for free quoting](#), assuming your firearm isn’t too far gone to be saved, a model we don’t work on, or something that would cost far more to restore than it’s worth. Whenever possible we offer suggestions for other gunsmiths who might be able to take on your project if it’s something we can’t help with.

The slideshow below displays a fire-damaged Winchester 1894 Deluxe Takedown, after its “bath”, that is a firearm restoration candidate.

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How can I prevent losing my firearms in a fire?

A fire-proof safe is always a good prevention step. Regular gun safes can heat up and act as an oven in a fire, but are still preferable to leaving your firearms unsecured.

Another good option for higher value firearms and collections is insurance. [One insurance company we’ve worked with in the past is Core-Vens Insurance](#). We offer insurance appraisals on your fire-damaged firearms for \$150. Some customers have asked us whether they should get their firearms in a bath right away, or if they need to wait until the firearms have been appraised for their insurance claim. We asked Tim Hartsock at Core-Vens that question. “Your insurance company won’t penalize you for trying to preserve your property,” he told us. “It’s better to give it the chance to be saved than to gamble that it’ll still be salvageable in a few days or weeks after the soot has had a chance to eat away at it. Take some good pictures of the damaged firearms and do your best to preserve it.” At the end of the day, that’s an individual judgment call, but if it’s something that you’re attached to—or that you know has great value—we think you’re better off halting the corrosion from the soot and smoke with a bath.

We hope that you and your family will never have to deal with a fire. But if you do, know that we’re here to help. From assessing the safety of the firearm, to insurance

appraisals, all the way to full restorations, we're here to make sure your firearm is one less casualty of your fire.

28 Comments

Bill Martin on November 30, 2018 at 8:32 am

Great info on fire damage help
damaged weapons least year.
thanks

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Reply

Sara Turnbull on November 30, 2018 at 8:37 am

Glad we could add something! And it's always good to hear a
firearm was saved to shoot another day.

Reply

Charkes on December 5, 2018 at 9:36 am

I work in a shop in calif and have recently gotten in a few firearms
that have been l a fire and have seen the rust you are talking about
.... I will try the bath solution TODAY ... hopefully this will help
thanks for the info !!!!!

Reply

Sara Turnbull on December 5, 2018 at 10:33 am

I'm so glad this post found you! Hopefully their firearms
aren't too far gone and you guys can save them at your shop.
Good luck!

Reply

Steven D Lemaster on February 23, 2021 at 10:22 pm

I have a 98 action that a uncle gave me. It was a rifle but was in a bad fire. Je gave it to me because he thought it was a lost cause. I totally disassembled what was left of the rife. The barrel was discarded and the bolt and action components disassembled, cleaned and reassembled. I was considering installing a new barrel chambered for the 6.8 Western. What are your thoughts.

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Sara Turnbull on February 24, 2021 at 9:28 am

Hi Steven,

I would take it to a gunsmith and have them check it out. We don't work on 98s, so I wouldn't recommend using us for that, but there are lots of skilled folks out there that I'm sure can help you assess it.

Thanks,

Sara

Reply

Jimmy E Allen on May 9, 2022 at 2:45 pm

I have a pistol that was in a fire it was handed down 38 special believe nickel plated could it be sent to you to check out.

Sara Turnbull on June 21, 2022 at 9:23 am

Hi Jimmy,

Yes, we can take a look at it to see if it can be repaired or restored. You can find information on sending your firearm to us here:

<https://www.turnbullrestoration.com/a>

[bout/faq/shipping-information/](#)

Thanks,

Sara

Bob Perkins on December 27, 2018 at 11:13 pm

Your restorations look far better than most new “high-class” firearms that I’ve seen! They are incredible! I have a 1911 old Parker VH E double that I had it for 58 years and now finally I don’t have enough time left to fully enjoy the finished product! I am going to try and buy one of your beautiful showroom guns before I check out! Keep up the beautiful work Mr. Turnbull!

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Reply

Sara Turnbull on December 28, 2018 at 8:14 am

Thanks, Mr. Perkins!

Reply

Michael miles on March 17, 2019 at 1:50 am

1911 handgun. Fire heat up to 1200. Gun in ammo can. Color pale orange. Frozen. Feds would not let us go to property for a month.

Reply

Sara Turnbull on March 18, 2019 at 7:51 am

Sorry to hear about the fire. It sounds like your pistol really took some damage. Unfortunately I think you have yourself a wall hanger now. Although getting there sooner probably wouldn’t have saved your pistol, since it did heat up so much.

Reply

Brian on April 20, 2019 at 2:43 pm

You had you had to replace almost everything, would be nice to know what you replaced.

Reply

Sara Turnbull on April 20, 2019 at 2:43 pm

Good question. As Doug mentioned, I replaced the firing pin, the cylinder, and the ejector. I also replaced some other additional parts, but those are the major ones he remembers.

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Reply

Steve on July 6, 2019 at 11:29 pm

Most of my town including my house burned down November 8th 2018 and we weren't allowed back in until December 15th, lots of rain in between. Guns were in a metal gun cabinet (not fireproof or waterproof). House was mostly incinerated except for the metal parts of my guns: 30-30 Winchester (no plastic parts), S&W Bodyguard automatic, Russian SKS, ect. Unfortunately I didn't read this article until now July 6, 2019. I oiled them all down but didn't know that I should scrub them down. The SKS looks like the barrel warped. All of the wood and grips are completely burned up on all of them. I'll rebuild the Winchester to be a mantle piece, the rest are toast.

Reply

Sara Turnbull on July 8, 2019 at 1:14 pm

I'm sorry to hear about that, Steve. That sounds like a good plan for the Winchester. If you need any recommendations for parts you can check out our Industry Links page, or get in touch: <https://www.turnbullrestoration.com/about/industry-links/>

Reply

Ron McElroy on March 6, 2020 at 11:13 pm

Is it possible to send you a couple of pics of what I believe was a fire gun, for your inspection and expert opinion of it, and if you think it went through a fire?

Thank-you for sharing your photos; proving that skilled firearms craftsmanship still exists in America, even though the day and age in which we presently live is saturated with gun violence and low quality”.

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Sara Turnbull on March 9, 2020 at 12:17 pm

Hi Ron,

We could certainly take a look at those photos for you! You will probably need to take it to a local gunsmith or send it in to us to be sure, but there are some tell-tale signs that we may be able to identify through photos. Feel free to email those to us at info@turnbullrestoration.com

Thanks,

Sara

Reply

Cardo on April 21, 2020 at 11:13 am

My firearm burned totally down, would it be possible to restore it?

Reply

Sara Turnbull on April 21, 2020 at 11:39 am

Hi Cardo,

Thanks for commenting. That’s a very tough question to answer without seeing the firearm, but from your description (“burned totally down”) I would guess it’s probably beyond saving. You’re welcome to email us with photos and more details: info@turnbullrestoration.com.

Thanks,
Sara

Reply

Mark Jenkinson on May 8, 2020 at 4:10 pm

A number of years ago I was given a rifle that was in a house fire with all the replacement stock on it . Great

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Can the receiver be re-heat treated, replacement parts are available , barrel, bolt, etc. Can it safely be restored?

Appreciate your advice,

Mark

Reply

Sara Turnbull on May 11, 2020 at 9:20 am

Hi Mark,

Generally if the wood has burned off in the fire that's a sign that the firearm is too damaged to be restored. However, we don't specifically work on bolt action rifles (and aren't looking at yours in person) so I would recommend getting a second opinion from someone such as Dave Norin, who specializes in bolt action rifles.

Thanks,
Sara

Reply

Walt on July 3, 2020 at 2:40 pm

My guns all have a lot of rust from water vapor and soot caused by a house fire. They were in a safe. I was wondering if the value of regular common firearms is such that it is easier to just replace them than try to revalue a \$200-600 gun. Insurance I had is trying to cheap out on paying for guns and tools, and suggested cleaning.

[Reply](#)

Sara Turnbull on July 6, 2020 at 9:47 am

Hi Walt,

I'm sorry to hear about your house fire. I would recommend cleaning them up as best as you can. I would recommend a gunsmith for evaluation and cleaning. If they need to be shot. If they need to be shot, they would probably be worth something to discuss with your gunsmith.

Sara

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[Reply](#)

John Murdock II on February 28, 2021 at 7:36 pm

Great advice and information. I do several house fire jobs a year. I wish more people would follow the advice outlined in the article, though it would mean less work for me.

[Reply](#)

Kerwin on December 15, 2021 at 3:28 pm

Well I'm here because my firearms just were exposed to the acidic smoke of a house fire. The stainless steel was pitted before the firefighters even had their hoses stored.

The bluing wiped off with WD-40 soaked rag. (it's all i had)

It's painful, some may live for another day but will never be close to the same.

[Reply](#)

Stephen Sabol on June 20, 2022 at 7:54 pm

Have a 38 s+w bodyguard with laser. Was in holster in purse in a truck cab fire on floor. Plastic grip melted and laser on side melted a bit.

Some blueing has a white look on it. Other things were salvaged and not destroyed credit cards money etc. do you do restoration and replace plastic grips and laser and clean check if ok to shoot and re-blue ?

Reply

Sara Turnbull on June 1, 2022

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Hi Stephen,
That's not a model that I might check with Smith & Wesson to see if they have any thoughts on its viability, or any recommendations for a shop that could repair your revolver.
Thanks,
Sara

Reply

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