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## NF91-16 Removing Smoke Odors from Clothing

Rose Marie Tondl

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## Removing Smoke Odors from Clothing

*Rose Marie Tondl, Extension Clothing Specialist*

Fire can cause considerable damage to homes, but smoke damage to clothing and textile items needs immediate and appropriate action.

Fires create two types of smoke damage — visible soot and invisible odor. Because each fire is different, it is not possible to provide one set of guidelines on how to remove soot and odor.

### **Where to Start**

First it is wise to contact the appropriate individual to help you. If you have insurance, contact your insurance agent for her/his suggestions and advice. If you rent, contact the owner so you both can assess the damage.

### **Prevent Damage**

Don't attempt to clean any textile items unless you know the proper procedures, because you can cause additional damage. Minimize further damage by drying any wet clothing as soon as possible to prevent mold and mildew. Hang clothing outside on a clothesline.

### **Removing Smoke Odor From Clothing**

Soiled clothing is cleaned by various methods. Read care labels to determine which articles are washable and which ones need to be dry-cleaned. Separate the washables into groups that are least, moderately, and most damaged to prevent redeposition of the sooty soil from heavily soiled items to those with lesser damage during the wash. The majority of clothing items will probably be cottons, polyesters, and polyester/cotton blends. These can be most effectively renewed by using a warm water wash with either a liquid detergent or a low phosphate powder detergent and a liquid chlorine bleach. Using a bleach may harm fabric color and fiber content. Up to five launderings may be necessary to remove the visible and odorous smoke damage. Researchers at Louisiana State University found that 100% polyester fabrics were not successfully returned to their original color state, but the smoke odor was removed. Dry cleaning was only partially effective in removing smoke odor. It was found to be the least effective

method of restoring fabric appearance and would add unnecessarily to the cleaning costs.

## **Removing Soot and Smoke Odor from Clothing**

Smoke odor could remain in clothing unless it is properly deodorized. Some dry cleaners use a deodorizing process that actually breaks up the smoke molecule to eliminate the odor. This process is called the ozone treatment and can be done at your home by a professional fire restorer using an ozone generator. Check with the dry-cleaners in your area to see if they provide the **ozone treatment**. This treatment produces an oxidizing agent that creates the sweet smell in the air associated with a rain storm. Clothing and other textile items should be deodorized **before** they are cleaned; otherwise, the smoke odor could be set in the fabric.

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*File NF16 under **TEXTILES, CLOTHING AND DESIGN***

***B-2, Care***

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