

BACK HOME NYC

GUIDANCE ON WHAT TO DO AFTER A FIRE
OR OTHER EMERGENCY FOR NYC TENANTS

Mayor's Office to Protect Tenants
Mayor's Office of Housing Recovery Operations — Back Home Unit
Mayor's Office of Public Engagement
Department of Housing Preservation and Development
Department of Buildings
311 | nyc.gov



**IF YOU'VE RECENTLY BEEN
DISPLACED FROM YOUR HOME BY
A FIRE OR ANOTHER HAZARDOUS
EMERGENCY, THIS GUIDE IS FOR
YOU. IT PROVIDES STEP-BY-STEP
INFORMATION ABOUT WHAT
HAPPENS WHEN AN EMERGENCY
AFFECTS THE SAFETY OF A
RESIDENTIAL BUILDING. IT EXPLAINS
TENANT RIGHTS, LANDLORD AND
OWNER RESPONSIBILITIES, AND THE
CITY RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO
SUPPORT RECOVERY AND A SAFE
RETURN HOME.**

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

Dear New Yorkers,

Our homes are precious. A stable home is the foundation for so much else in our lives – where we eat, rest, work, or raise a family. A disaster that forces you from your home can not only be destabilizing, it can leave New Yorkers feeling as if they have nowhere to turn and no place to go. From a fire to a flood, the recovery process from a displacement-inducing incident is challenging, but fortunately, there are resources from the City that are available to help you get back on your feet.

This guide shares detailed information on the relief that is available and provides tools to help you navigate the often-complex process of getting back home.

Whether you're looking for assistance with temporary relocation or finding out when you can return to your home, dealing with government bureaucracy should be the last thing you have to worry about. Fortunately, the Back Home Unit of the Mayor's Office of Housing Recovery Operations is available to assist you with information and resources after an emergency.

This new Back Home NYC guide and online portal will make a difficult time easier, consolidating everything you need to know from city government into one place. The guide will walk you through how to respond, which agencies can help with which of your needs, what your landlord's responsibilities are, and your rights as a student or worker. The new Back Home portal will also allow you to more easily find out how safe your building is, and when you can return home. These tools and resources will improve the City's services to New Yorkers who are dealing with an emergency, streamlining our operations and more effectively getting New Yorkers back into the safe and stable homes they deserve.

When an emergency strikes, you deserve support – and a government that fights for you. With these new resources, we are doing all we can to help New Yorkers in need navigate a hard and uncertain time. If you find yourself in need of these services, know that our government is on your side.

Yours in Service,

Zohran Kwame Mamdani
Mayor of New York City
March 2026

Executive Summary

Contact the Back Home Unit as soon as possible. They are here to help coordinate all your housing recovery needs.

Keep your contact information updated with your landlord, HPD, and the Back Home Unit so they can reach you with updates about repairs and your Vacate Order.

Stay in communication with your landlord and your neighbors. Ask about the status of repairs and permit applications regularly.

Apply for financial assistance as soon as possible through HRA. Do not wait to see if you can manage on your own.

Document all damage with photos and keep receipts for temporary housing and expenses—you may need these for insurance claims and benefit applications. Go to the New York DFS complaint website and open the Consumer Complaint application to file an insurance complaint about your displacement after a Vacate Order in New York City [here](#).

Seek mental health support if you need it. There is no shame in reaching out. Free, confidential help is available 24/7 through NYC 988.

Know your tenant's rights. You are protected by law and cannot be evicted simply because of a Vacate Order.

If you face harassment from your landlord, contact 311 and ask for the Tenant Helpline for free legal help.

NYCHA residents displaced by a Vacate Order should call the Customer Contact Center at 718-707-7771 right away to report the emergency and get help with next steps and services. [Click here](#) and/or contact RRSD at 212-306-3057 or email rrsd@nycha.nyc.gov.

Introduction:

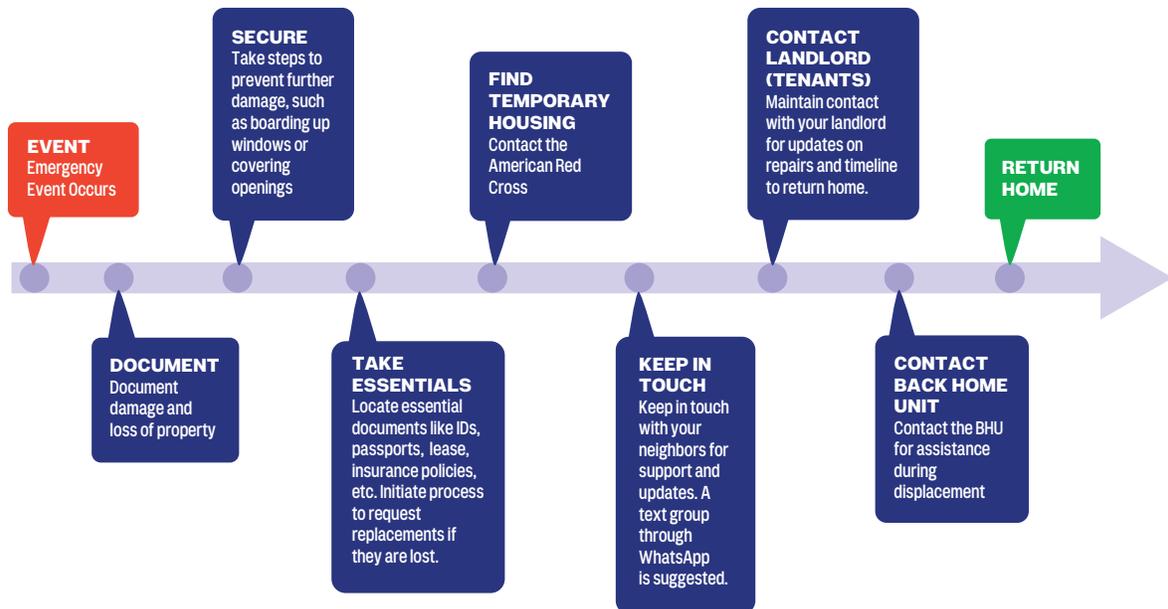
Being told you must leave your home after a fire or other emergency is overwhelming – but you are not alone. The City of New York is here to help. This guide walks you through what happens immediately following a fire or another hazardous emergency, explains what a **Vacate Order** means, and outlines the resources available to support you.

The Mayor’s Office of Housing Recovery Operations – Back Home Unit can assist you with accessing information and resources that can support you following an emergency. You can reach the Back Home Unit by:

- calling 311 and asking to be connected to the Back Home Unit,
- visiting backhome.nyc.gov and filling out an information form,
- calling 212-389-6670 or
- emailing backhome@recovery.nyc.gov.

Contact information for the resources listed in this guide can be found in the appendix under **Key Contacts and Resources**.

This guide provides general information only and is not legal advice. Laws, procedures, and available resources may change, and individual situations may vary. For the most up-to-date information, please call 311. You can also reach out to the Back Home Unit, and a representative will contact any of the agencies listed in this guide on your behalf.



What Happens Right After a Fire or Emergency

After a fire or other event that causes damage to your home, several City agencies work together to make sure that you and your building are safe:

- **The Fire Department (FDNY)** fire marshals may conduct scene examinations to determine the origin and cause of a fire and may restrict access to the building until the examination is fully completed and the area is deemed safe. In addition, the Bureau of Fire Prevention provides subject matter expertise on fire code compliance and the issuing of necessary enforcement instruments.
- **The Department of Buildings (DOB)** inspects the building's structure to check if it is stable and safe.
- **The Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD)** may inspect your apartment to determine if there are health or safety issues that make your home not livable, including whether electricity and heat are working.
- **The American Red Cross (ARC)** can help determine your immediate needs after the incident, offer temporary shelter if you are forced to leave your home (typically a hotel stay for up to two nights), and connect you with the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) or the Human Resources Administration (HRA) for longer-term support. The ARC may not be present at every incident, but if they are not on the scene, you can still contact them by calling their 24-hour hotline at (877) 733-2767 Option 1.

Important: For your safety, you must follow the instructions of any City official at the site. You may not attempt to go into your apartment or house to get anything unless and until the City says it is safe to do so. **No City agency will ask about your immigration status unless it is required by law or necessary to determine eligibility for a benefit.**

Retrieving Your Belongings and Essential Items

If you left your home in an emergency, it may be necessary to return to secure your essential personal belongings. If the building is safe enough to enter, you may be allowed to retrieve essential items such as:

- Medication and medical equipment
- Important identification documents (passport, birth certificate, Social Security card)
- Important papers and insurance information
- Irreplaceable personal items

If possible, you should coordinate access with your landlord. If the building is not yet safe, you should contact the Back Home Unit to help you coordinate with the Fire Department or Department of Buildings who will be able to tell you when it is possible to retrieve belongings, and which City agency may supervise the process.



Retrieving or Finding Your Pets and Service Animals

While every situation may be different, if American Red Cross staff is on-site, alert them immediately if you've been separated from pets or assistance animals who are still in the building. If your pet is missing, check with local emergency veterinary facilities to see if they've been taken there. You can also contact Animal Care Centers of NYC (ACC) at 212-788-4000 or visit nycacc.org/lost-found for assistance with missing pets.

IF YOUR PET IS STILL INSIDE THE BUILDING

If your pet is still inside the building, try to coordinate with the building staff or landlord to retrieve your animal and keep a record of your correspondence. Legal services organizations can advise you of any additional rights you may have. A Back Home Unit representative can help connect you if needed.

ASSISTANCE WITH PET NEEDS

If you are with your pet (with the exclusion of service animals), and they cannot enter shelter with you, please connect with the Red Cross. If the Red Cross is on-site, they can connect you with partner animal welfare organizations that may help with temporary boarding, pet supplies, and other animal-related needs.

Boarding support is often limited. If possible, ask a trusted friend or family member to help temporarily house your pets.

Local rescue organizations may also be able to help with short-term care. A Back Home Unit representative may be able to give you information about organizations near you.

If the Red Cross is not present, you can reach out to the Back Home Unit or contact Animal Care Centers of NYC (ACC) directly. They may be able to offer resources or make a referral, at 212-788-4000 or CommunityPets@nycacc.org

SERVICE ANIMALS AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMALS

Service animals and emotional support animals (ESAs) may have special legal protections:

- Housing providers, including shelters and temporary housing, must provide a reasonable accommodation to permit service animals or ESAs unless doing so would cause an undue hardship.
- Policies that limit pet sizes or breeds, impose pet fees/deposits, or ban pets do NOT apply to service animals or ESAs.

There is an important distinction between service animals and emotional support animals under the law. Service animals and emotional support animals are treated differently under the law.

Service animals are individually trained to perform specific tasks for a person with a disability and are protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Service animals are generally allowed to accompany their handler in most public places, including shelters and temporary housing, even where pets are not permitted.

Emotional support animals (ESAs) provide comfort through their presence but are not trained to perform specific tasks. ESAs are protected primarily under the Fair Housing Act (FHA). While housing providers, including shelters and temporary housing, must consider reasonable accommodations for ESAs, ESAs do not have guaranteed access to public spaces and may be restricted outside of housing settings.

Both service animals and ESAs must be accommodated in housing as a reasonable accommodation, and housing providers may not apply pet fees, deposits, breed restrictions, or size limits to either.

The NYC Human Rights Law protects against disability discrimination in housing, including for people who rely on emotional support animals as a reasonable accommodation for their disabilities. If you have experienced or witnessed discrimination, contact the NYC Commission on Human Rights at 212-416-0197 or visit NYC.gov/HumanRights.

If you have questions about your rights or need help requesting a accommodation, call NYC 311 and ask for the Tenant Helpline.

Vacate Orders

WHAT IS A VACATE ORDER?

A **Vacate Order** is an official notice from a City agency saying that a building, apartment, or home is not safe to live in. Vacate Orders are issued when there is a dangerous condition that could seriously harm residents or the public. They are issued because of unsafe or unlivable conditions, often after emergencies such as fires, floods, or structural damage. They require that residents leave immediately or by a specific date. You may not live in your home while a Vacate Order is in effect. Note, that while you must leave until the Vacate Order is lifted, you cannot be evicted because of a Vacate Order.

WHICH CITY AGENCIES CAN ISSUE VACATE ORDERS AND WHY

CITY AGENCIES THAT CAN ISSUE VACATE ORDERS	
Multiple agencies can issue vacate orders for the same building if different unsafe conditions exist . Each agency must lift its own order before residents can return.	
<p>Department of Buildings (DOB)</p> <p>STRUCTURAL HAZARDS</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unsafe building structure • Blocked or unsafe exits • Dangerous conditions 	<p>Housing Preservation and Development (HPD)</p> <p>UNSAFE OR UNLIVABLE</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No heat, electricity, or water • Fire or flood damage • Unhealthy conditions
<p>Fire Department of New York (FDNY)</p> <p>FIRE SAFETY HAZARDS</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire-damaged areas • Severe fire risks • Hazardous after a fire 	<p>Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)</p> <p>ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asbestos or toxins • Severe contaminations • DOB may issue order
ALL VACATE ORDERS MUST BE LIFTED BEFORE YOU CAN RETURN HOME	

Several City agencies are authorized to issue Vacate Orders based on their specific responsibilities. More than one agency may issue a Vacate Order for the same property if multiple unsafe conditions exist. If more than one agency issues a Vacate Order for your apartment, each order must be lifted by the issuing agency before anyone can return.

POSTING OF VACATE ORDERS

A Vacate Order must be prominently posted at the building. You can check if your building or apartment has an active Vacate Order [here](#). The posted notice should include:

- The reason the Vacate Order was issued, and
- The name of the City agency or agencies that issued the order.

Vacate Orders posted at the building may include QR codes under the issuing agency's name. Tenants are encouraged to scan the QR codes for the most up-to-date information. These QR codes link to agency-specific information, including:

- Details about the Vacate Order
- What conditions must be corrected
- How to get updates from the issuing agency

Fire Reports

Fire reports provide an official accounting of the FDNY response to a fire and information about the cause. Insurance companies, contractors, and other entities often require a fire report to provide services.

In most cases, fire reports must be requested from FDNY through the FOIL process. There are three types of reports you can request:

- 1.** Fire Incident Report: This is the basic accounting of the details of a fire incident and FDNY response. It includes a simple description of how the fire started. An Incident Report is completed for every fire.
- 2.** Full Fire Marshal Investigation Report: This is the report issued at the conclusion of a Fire Marshal's investigation if an investigation is needed to determine the origin and cause of a fire. FDNY does not conduct an investigation of all fires.
- 3.** Fire Marshal Face Sheet: The Fire Marshal Face Sheet is a summary of the full Fire Marshal Investigation Report for those fires that are

Fire Marshal Investigation Report for those fires that are investigated and contains the origin and cause of the fire. The Face Sheet is automatically included with the full Investigation Report. For the Face Sheet to be released, the investigation must be complete.

To request these reports, submit a FOIL request through the City's Open Records website [here](#). Follow the prompts for FDNY FOIL requests.

Fire reports may take several weeks or even a few months to finish, especially if the fire was serious or under investigation. If you need a fire report, you should submit a request as soon as possible.

For fires where residents of five (5) or more units have been displaced, the Back Home Unit will be able to provide the Fire Incident Report to displaced residents directly. Please check with the Back Home Unit before submitting a FOIL request.



NYCHA Residents:

If you live in a NYCHA apartment and are displaced after a Vacate Order, call the NYCHA Customer Contact Center at 718-707-7771 as soon as possible to report the emergency and ask what help may be available, such as repairs, temporary relocation, or updates about your apartment.

You may also contact NYCHA's Resident Relocation Services Department (RRSD), which provides advance notice, meets with you, and can arrange a comparable NYCHA apartment or hotel, help with packing and moving, and connect you to social services for added support. NYCHA or its partners may cover reasonable moving and storage costs, certain utility and other housing-related fees, and some food and transportation costs during hotel stays. Some NYCHA buildings operate under HUD's Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) and Permanent Affordability Commitment Together (PACT) programs, which allow NYCHA to partner with private and nonprofit organizations for major repairs while keeping apartments affordable and under longterm Section 8 rules. If your building is part of a RAD/PACT partnership, your management team or NYCHA representative can explain how relocation and repair procedures apply to your development.

Check on the Status of your Return Home:

To learn more about the status of a vacate order, you can check the following online resources. You can also reach out to the Back Home Unit and we will contact HPD and DOB on your behalf.

CHECK THE STATUS OF WORK BEING DONE IN YOUR BUILDING

The Vacate Order should state what needs to be completed before the Vacate Order is lifted. You can track the status of construction and repairs by checking permit applications filed for work being done in your building online. Applications filed with DOB are available online through either the [DOB NOW public portal](#), or the Buildings Information System (BIS). Once an owner files an application, you can sign up to receive automatic Job Status updates [here](#). The Back Home Unit can help you understand what has been done and still needs to be done.

Why You Had to Leave Your Apartment & What the Landlord Must Do

Why You Had to Leave	City Agency	What It Means	What the Landlord Must Do
 Structural Damage	DOB	Building is not safe, could collapse	Fix walls, floors, or roof; Get DOB permits; <i>Pass inspection</i>
 Fire or Life Danger	FDNY / DOB	Fire damage or serious safety risk	Remove fire hazards; Get DOB or FDNY approval; <i>Pass inspection</i>
 Flood Damage	DOB / HPD	Flood caused unsafe conditions or no utilities	Repair damage; Restore heat/electric; <i>Pass inspection</i>
 Uninhabitable	HPD	No heat, hot water, pests, or illegal apartment	Fix all conditions; <i>HPD inspection</i>
 Environmental Hazard	DOB / HPD	Fix all conditions; <i>HPD inspection</i>	<i>HPD inspection</i>
 Environmental Hazard	DOB / HPD	Remove hazard; Permits if needed;	Remove hazard; Permits if needed; <i>Pass inspection</i>

Curing Violations

This chart shows your landlord's typical steps and responsibilities to address the conditions that led to a Vacate Order. The specific work needed will depend on the violations issued and the issuing agency's requirements. If your landlord has

questions about what needs to be done or what next steps are needed, they can call the Back Home Unit for help. All required repairs and corrective work must be performed by appropriately licensed and qualified professionals and permits and additional inspections may be required depending on the type of work.

After a Vacate Order has been issued, the owner has several clear repair obligations.

- The owner must fix the conditions that made the home unsafe and led to the Vacate Order.
- The owner may be required to hire a licensed engineer or architect and file all needed applications with the Department of Buildings so the repair work is done safely and follows code.
- After the unsafe conditions are corrected, the owner must ask the City to lift (“revoke”) the Vacate Order so tenants can return.
- HPD can require, as a condition of lifting the Vacate Order, that the owner make a reasonable effort to notify tenants who moved out that they have the right to move back in.

How do I know when it is safe to return?

Landlords are often required by law to notify you when the building is deemed safe and the Vacate Order is lifted. Stay in contact with your landlord. You can also check the status with HPD or the Back Home Unit.

What If I Don't Have a Vacate Order?

If there is damage to your apartment but it is still livable and you are not offered temporary shelter by the American Red Cross, you should:

- Report all damage directly to your landlord right away, in writing if possible.
- If repairs are not made in a timely manner, you can file complaints about the conditions by calling 311. The applicable City agency will inspect your apartment if necessary.
- You may be able to withhold some or all of your rent if your landlord fails to resolve problems that make it unsafe to stay in your home and if you vacate your home after your landlord fails to resolve the issue. This is what is called a constructive eviction. It is important to check with a tenants' rights organizations or legal service organization before doing this to make sure you have the legal right to do so and don't create a cause for eviction.

- Next steps will depend on which agency conducts the inspection and whether violations are found.

If you believe your home is not livable (for example, your apartment has no windows and significant water damage from the fire) and a Vacate Order has not been issued, you can call 311 for emergency assistance, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. For hearing impaired, call ITY (212) 863-5504.

Where Can I Stay If I Am Forced to Leave My Home?

If you have a Vacate Order or cannot safely live in your apartment, help is available for both short-term and longer-term housing. Even if you do not need support securing temporary housing, everyone who faces a housing emergency should register with the Back Home Unit, HPD, and the Red Cross. This ensures that you will be updated and informed when the Vacate Order is lifted and you can return home.

SHORT-TERM SHELTER (UP TO 2 NIGHTS)

American Red Cross: The Red Cross provides emergency shelter for up to two nights to households once a vacate order is issued and the household can verify that they came from the vacated address. Registration for Red Cross services is usually done on-site but can also be completed by phone. They will often be available on site, call them at **(877) 733-2767 Option 1**. Spanish interpretation is available, and call-takers can use telephonic interpretation services for other languages as needed. If additional language services are needed, call the Back Home Unit or 311 to assist with the call.

TEMPORARY HOUSING (WHILE REPAIRS ARE BEING MADE)

HPD Emergency Housing Services (EHS) may provide eligible households with relocation assistance including emergency temporary housing services beyond the length of the Red Cross stay, and possibly for the duration of the Vacate Order. EHS assists households who are displaced due to City-issued vacate orders. You can also register for off-site services and light case management services if you do not need temporary housing assistance. Registration is conducted remotely by phone and email; in person intake is also available by appointment only.

To register, click [here](#), or call (212) 863-7660 and leave a message, or email ehs-remote@hpd.nyc.gov. The HPD phone line includes a recorded message in both English and Spanish and interpretation in multiple languages is available through 311 or the Back Home Unit.

WHAT IS AN “ELIGIBLE HOUSEHOLD” FOR TEMPORARY EMERGENCY HOUSING SERVICES THROUGH HPD?

An eligible household is one that meets HPD Emergency Housing Services requirements at the time of displacement. Eligibility is determined by whether you can show you lived at the vacated location.

HPD reviews eligibility on a case-by-case basis. Being displaced by an emergency event does not automatically guarantee placement, but HPD will assess each household individually.

EHS cannot enroll clients from privately owned buildings if the person is the owner, a family member of the owner, or an employee.

WHAT YOU NEED TO SHOW

You will need documents that prove your identity and that you lived in the building that was ordered vacated. You can prove your identity by providing one of the documents below:

- Passport or Passport Card
- NYCID
- Driver’s License or State ID
- Birth Certificate
- Permanent Resident Card (Green Card)
- U.S. Visa

For children under 18, you may use:

- Birth Certificate
- Letter from a pediatrician
- Proof of legal guardianship
- Letter from a school that lists the child’s address

To prove that you lived in the building that was ordered vacated, you can provide a copy of your lease, sublease, or license agreement.

If you do not have a lease, you must provide **two (2)** of the documents below:

- A notarized statement from the building owner confirming that you lived there
- A residential utility bill

- A record from a government agency
- A government-issued photo ID
- A medical record or prescription showing your name and address
- A notarized statement from a non-government service provider confirming that you lived in the vacated building

HPD may accept other documents if they clearly show that you lived in the building subject to a Vacate Order. Examples include:

- Pay stubs or payroll records
- Bank statements
- Credit card statements

WHAT IF MY HOUSEHOLD IS NOT ELIGIBLE FOR TEMPORARY EMERGENCY HOUSING?

If your household is not eligible for HPD Emergency Housing Services, you still have important options and support:

- **NYC Homebase** can help with housing stabilization, relocation assistance, and preventing homelessness. Call NYC 311 and say “Homebase” or go to nyc.gov/homebase.
- **Legal Aid or Legal Services NYC** can advise you on tenant rights, rent obligations, and next steps.

Even if you are not placed in City shelter, you should still register with the Back Home Unit, HPD, and the Red Cross so the City has your contact information and can notify you when the Vacate Order is lifted.

The Back Home Unit can still:

- Track inspections and Vacate Order status
- Provide updates on when you may return home
- Coordinate with City agencies
- Try to connect you with other non-profit resources



What Are My Landlord's Responsibilities After an Emergency Event?

Your landlord should:

- Secure the building. Property owners and building management must take steps to secure the building as soon as possible. They must work to board up broken windows, holes in the roof, and other access points to prevent further damage and intrusion should be done immediately – on the same day as the incident.
- Notify tenants of next steps and timelines for repairs. Stay in communication with your landlord throughout the recovery process and keep notes of your conversations.
- Contact their insurance company to fund repairs. Your landlord most likely has their own insurance policy, and the insurer will likely conduct an inspection to determine liability and next steps.
- Obtain any required DOB permits before rebuilding. Your landlord will hire a construction company to fix damage. They must submit applications for permits to the DOB, and once approved, work should begin. DOB may order emergency work to commence before permits are issued. You can keep track of the permits on [DOB's website](#).

- Complete all required repairs and request formal inspections from agencies that issued Vacate Orders.
- Notify you directly when you are able to return to your apartment and it is legally safe to do so.

HOW LANDLORDS MUST HANDLE ASBESTOS AND OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

After an emergency, your landlord may be required to test for asbestos throughout the building and, if found, have it removed. For urgent concerns about asbestos, call DEP's Asbestos Control Program at (718) 595-3682. For more information on asbestos and air quality concerns, contact the NYC [Department of Health](#).

Your Rights as a Tenant

As a tenant, you cannot be evicted simply because a Vacate Order was issued. Your rights to your apartment are protected, even if you cannot live there during repairs. If your apartment is rent stabilized or rent controlled, you may be qualified for a rent reduction while you cannot live there due to the Vacate Order. You can file an Application for a Rent Reduction Based Upon Decreased Services (Form RA-81) through the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR). Your rent may be reduced to as low as \$1 per month until your apartment is habitable again.

YOUR LANDLORD CANNOT HARASS YOU

Actions by your landlord intended to force you to give up your rights or to prevent your return MAY count as harassment and are illegal. Some things that might constitute harassment may include:

- Not offering leases, lease renewals, or repeatedly trying to pay you to move out or give up your rights after you have informed the landlord that you do not want to receive such offers (referred to as a "buyout")
- Not allowing you to retrieve belongings when the building is safe to enter
- Offering you a buyout while threatening, intimidating, or using obscene language, contacting you at your workplace without written permission, or providing false information
- Unjustified eviction notices or illegal lockouts
- Threats and intimidation (phone calls, messages, or in-person pressure to move out or give up your rights)

- Deliberately causing construction-related problems for tenants (such as working after hours, blocking entrances, or failing to remove excessive dust and debris)
- Not making repairs required by the Vacate Order in a timely manner
- Failing to notify you or attempting to rent to another person when the building or apartment is deemed habitable and the Vacate Order is rescinded

WHAT TO DO IF YOU FACE HARASSMENT

If your landlord is harassing you or you feel pressured to move out, contact 311 and ask for the Tenant Helpline. Under New York City’s Right-to-Counsel (RTC) law, DSS/HRA’s Office of Civil Justice (OCJ) provides tenants facing eviction in Housing Court or NYCHA administrative proceedings access to free legal representation and advice provided by nonprofit legal services organizations from across the five boroughs. Call 311 and ask for Right to Counsel. You cannot be forced to give up your rights.

Insurance and Replacing Damaged Property

NON-PROFIT RESOURCES

Some not-for-profit organizations, including local faith-based organizations, may help you replace furniture or clothing. The Back Home Unit may have information about locations near you that often have this type of help available.

RENTERS INSURANCE

If you have renters insurance, it typically covers damage to your personal belongings (furniture, electronics, clothing, etc.) and additional living expenses if you are forced to move out, such as temporary housing, meals, and other related costs. To begin the claims process:

- Contact your insurer promptly – many insurance policies require immediate notice or have deadlines for filing that could affect whether or not your claim is approved.
- Document all damage with photos and videos before any cleanup begins.
- Keep a detailed list of all destroyed or damaged items. The list should be a room-by-room inventory, including brand names, model numbers, and purchase dates if possible.
- If the apartment is uninhabitable, your renter’s policy’s “loss of use”

- coverage may pay for temporary housing (hotel stays, etc.) and additional food expenses.
- Do not pay cash and save all receipts for temporary housing, meals, and any other expenses you incur due to the emergency.

Your landlord is responsible for repairing the building but is not responsible for replacing your personal belongings. Your renter’s insurance is your protection for your belongings.

FILING A COMPLAINT ABOUT A RENTERS INSURANCE CLAIM

If your renters’ insurance claim is wrongfully denied, delayed, or not handled fairly, you have the right to file a complaint with the New York State Department of Financial Services (DFS). DFS regulates insurance companies in New York and can review whether your insurer followed the law and the terms of your policy. Filing a complaint is free and does not affect your right to pursue other options. When you file, include copies of your policy, claim number, and any letters or emails from the insurer. DFS may contact the company for an explanation and require a response, which can help move your claim forward or correct improper handling.

You can file your complaint online through the DFS consumer portal, by phone, by email, or by mail – whichever is most accessible for you:

- Website (consumer complaint portal): [Online complaint form](#)
- Toll-free phone: (800) 342-3736 (DFS Consumer Assistance hotline)
- Direct phone (NYC): (212) 480-6400
- Email: consumers@dfs.ny.gov (for help or questions about filing)
- Mailing address:
New York State Department of Financial Services
Consumer Assistance Unit
1 State Street
New York, NY 10004

Replacing Prescription Medications After a Vacate Order

If you are displaced from your home due to a Vacate Order and cannot access your prescription medications, help is available. Do not stop taking prescribed medications without speaking to a health care professional. If you have an urgent

medical need or are experiencing a medical emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.

If your apartment is safe enough to enter, you may request access to your apartment in order to obtain necessary medication. If you cannot access your apartment, some steps you can take immediately are:

- **Contact your pharmacy** as soon as possible. Many pharmacies can refill prescriptions early during an emergency or transfer prescriptions to another pharmacy location. They can also sometimes provide emergency supplies if your medications were lost or destroyed due to a fire or emergency. Bring any documentation and information that you have, such as a photo of your prescription label, if available.
- **Contact your health care provider** to request a replacement prescription or an emergency refill authorization.
- **Insurance and Emergency Refills** Contact your health insurance plans. Some, including Medicaid, may allow emergency or early refills when medications are lost due to an emergency or disaster. If you experience difficulties obtaining a refill, your pharmacy or provider may help contact your insurance plan on your behalf.

IF YOU CANNOT AFFORD YOUR MEDICATION

NYC Health + Hospitals facilities can provide medical care regardless of immigration status or ability to pay and may assist with prescription replacement. You can find locations [here](#) or call 1-844-NYC-4NYC (844-692-4692) for an appointment.

HRA may provide emergency assistance in limited circumstances related to medical needs. See the One-Shot Deal information in this guide.

Call 311, text 311-692 or click [here](#) for DOHMH clinic locations.

Digital Access and Charging Needs

After a fire or Vacate Order, access to a phone, internet, and charging can be essential for receiving updates, contacting family, employers, landlords, and City agencies to apply for assistance.

- **Staying Connected:** If you lose access to electricity or internet service, public libraries offer free Wi-Fi, computer access, and charging stations. Many NYC shelters and temporary housing sites provide charging access and internet

service. Some community centers and nonprofit organizations may offer charging stations or device access.

- **Phone and Device Charging:** If your phone or medical or assistive device needs to be charged:
 - Ask shelter or temporary housing staff about charging areas or outlets, as well as access to portable chargers or power banks. Contact NYC 311 to locate nearby facilities with charging access. Call 311, text 311-692, or click [here](#).
- **Accessing City Services Online:** Many City services and updates are available online, including:
 - Housing and Vacate Order information
 - Benefit and emergency assistance applications
 - Job status and permit updates

If you need help navigating online services, library staff, Back Home Unit staff or shelter staff may be able to assist.

IMPORTANT: If you move to another temporary or a new permanent location, or change your phone number, it is important to keep your contact information up to date with your landlord, the Back Home Unit and any City agency assisting you. This helps ensure you receive important updates about inspections, housing assistance, and when it is safe to return home.

Important Documents: Replacing What Was Lost

If your personal documents were damaged or destroyed in the emergency, act quickly. You may need identification documents to apply for benefits or housing assistance.

- **Birth Certificates:** Visit the NYC Office of Vital Records online [here](#).
- **Social Security Card:** Contact the Social Security Administration at 1-800-772-1213, click [here](#), or visit your local SSA office.
- **State ID or Driver's License:** Contact the NYS Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) online [here](#).
- **Passport:** Contact the U.S. State Department online [here](#). You may file Form DS-64 online or visit a passport agency
- **Immigration Documents:** Contact [USCIS online](#) for green cards, visas, and permits.
- **IDNYC (NYC Municipal ID):** Contact IDNYC Customer Service by calling 311 or click [here](#).

- **Lease and Rental Records:** If your lease, rental history, or renter’s insurance documents were destroyed, contact your landlord, management company, or insurance provider for copies. These documents can help prove your residency when applying for assistance.

Financial Assistance and Long-Term Support

An emergency that displaces you from your home can quickly become a life-altering event that impacts your ability to work, earn income, and afford your mostly costs. Multiple City agencies offer financial assistance and long-term support after an emergency, especially if you cannot re-occupy your apartment for an extended time.

- **Emergency Cash Assistance (HRA One-Shot Deal):** Issued by the NYC Human Resources Administration (HRA), a **One-Shot Deal** is a one-time emergency payment from the NYC Human Resources Administration (HRA) that may help households resolve a housing-related crisis and prevent homelessness. It may help cover:
 - Rent arrears or security deposits
 - Utility arrears (electricity, gas, heat)
 - Broker’s fees (when required)
 - Moving costs related to displacement
 - Certain emergency housing-related expenses

Assistance is not guaranteed, is reviewed case-by-case, and may be issued as a loan depending on income and circumstances. To apply, call 311 and ask for the One-Shot Deal, or call HRA at (718) 557-1399.

- **SNAP Benefits Reimbursement:** If you receive SNAP (food stamps) and lost food items due to the emergency:
 - Report the loss within 10 days to be reimbursed
 - Contact HRA at (718) 557-1399 or visit your local Benefits Access Center
- **Rental Housing Assistance Program:** If you cannot meet your monthly housing costs following an emergency event that forces you to leave your home, you may be eligible for certain programs that can help such as **FHEPS (Family Homelessness and Eviction Prevention Supplement)**, which provides rental assistance for families who need stable housing after an emergency. Eligibility criteria:
 - At least one household member must be a minor
 - At least one household member must be eligible for cash assistance

- Household must maintain an open public benefits case
- Rent must be within the payment standards published by the Department of Social Services (DSS)

Back Home Unit representatives may be able to connect you to other resources, including help from the City or non-profit agencies.



NYC Public Schools

If there are school-age children in the household, you should immediately update your school with any address changes or changes to living arrangements.

STUDENT RIGHTS

Under the McKinney-Vento Act and Chancellor's Regulation A-780, a student in temporary housing may:

- Continue to receive free public education
- Stay in their current school or choose to attend a zoned school
- Not be denied immediate school enrollment because of their temporary housing status or they lack enrollment documentation
- Access transportation services to and from school
- Continue to receive special education services comparable to those offered to other students

You can register your child or find more information [here](#), or ask a Back Home Unit representative for assistance.

FAMILY WELCOME CENTERS (FWCS)

Family Welcome Centers serve New York City families year-round with enrollment and admissions by appointment. The hours of operation are Monday to Thursday: 8:00AM-5:00PM, Friday: 8:00AM-3:00 PM. FWCs can help with:

- Enrollment: Assistance with enrolling your child in New York City public schools.
- Transfers: Help with transferring your child to another New York City public school.
- Applications: Support applying for 3-K, Pre-K, Kindergarten, Middle, and High School

Students in temporary housing are not required to submit documentation (including address, proof of date of birth, and immunization records) in order to participate in any admission process or enroll in school.

TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

Transportation services for students in temporary housing may vary based on what school and grade they are in. Generally:

- Students in grades K-6 living in shelters are eligible for school bus service, or a student OMNY card if their parent declines school bus service.
- Students in grades K-6 not living in shelters (for example, those who are doubled-up) may be eligible for school bus service or for a student OMNY card.
- Preschool students who are temporarily homeless are eligible for school bus service (if an appropriate route exists) or, if they exceed height requirements in MTA regulations to ride for free, will receive a student OMNY card.
- Parents/guardians of students in temporary housing 3K- grade 12 who do not receive busing or are in the process of being routed can receive a Gold MetroCard from their child's school to accompany their child to and from school. To request an OMNY card, contact your child's school.

Families of students in temporary housing can speak to their shelter staff or NYCPS's Regional Manager who can help connect you with your child's school and understand your transportation options. For more information on the process please visit the [Students in Temporary Housing](#) page.

Employment and Work-Related Considerations

Being displaced by a fire or Vacate Order can affect your ability to work. The following information may help you manage employment-related issues during this time.

YOUR RIGHTS AS A WORKER

If displacement affects your ability to report to work, you may wish you notify your employer and request accommodation. It is important to know your rights as a worker before you notify your employer. If you are a member of a union, contact your union before contacting your employer. Your union will ensure that your contractual and legal workforce rights are protected and may help represent you in conversations with your employer. Your union may also have access to additional support services for its membership.

A fire or emergency event may affect your physical well-being. If you are sick due to an emergency displacement or Vacate Order, you should be aware that under New York City's Paid Safe and Sick Leave Law, you may have the right to a certain amount of paid time off. You can read more about NYC's Paid Sick leave law, and the rights it provides you as a worker, [here](#).

You may have additional rights under City, State, or federal law. If you have questions about your worker protections and are afraid of losing your job following a Vacate Order, call 311 immediately and ask to be connected to the **Worker Protection helpline**. A Vacate Order is a City safety action. Experiencing displacement due to an emergency should not be used to penalize you at work. If you are afraid of facing retaliation, the Back Home Unit can connect you to help.

While not all employers will be able to offer these accommodations, you may wish to request:

- Temporary schedule flexibility or remote work, if available
- Excused absences related to the emergency

You should provide documentation of the Vacate Order or displacement, if your employer requires it. HPD Vacate Orders are available for printing from HPD Online. If you need assistance with documentation, the Back Home Unit may be able to help.

LOST OR INACCESSIBLE WORK ITEMS

If work-related items (such as uniforms, tools, equipment, or identification) were lost or inaccessible due to a Vacate Order:

- Ask your employer about replacement options or temporary accommodations
- If retrieval is allowed, access may be limited or supervised based on building safety

Emotional, Mental Health, and Grief Support

Experiencing an emergency, displacement, or loss related to a fire or Vacate Order can be overwhelming. It is normal to feel stressed, anxious, sad, angry, or uncertain. Grief may also occur after the loss of a home, belongings, community, or loved one. You are not alone, and free, confidential support is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

CRISIS SUPPORT AND COUNSELING

NYC 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline Provides free, confidential crisis counseling, emotional support for New Yorkers experiencing stress, anxiety, or emotional distress, mental health and substance use support, and referrals. Available: 24/7. Call or text: 988 or 1-888-692-9355 or use the online chat 988lifeline.org

GRIEF AND BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT

NYC Health + Hospitals – Behavioral Health Services Provides grief counseling, bereavement support, and mental health services for individuals and families experiencing loss. Contact via text at NYC 988 or by calling 311. For more information, visit nychealthandhospitals.org. Services may include short-term counseling, referrals to grief support groups, and connections to longer-term mental health care.



Utilities and Mail After an Emergency

MAIL SERVICE

After an emergency, contact your local post office to confirm whether mail is already being held due to building damage, set up a mail hold (up to 30 days) or temporary change of address (can be extended up to one year), and pick up accumulated mail if a hold is in place. To set up USPS Mail Hold or Change of Address visit <https://moversguide.usps.com> or call 1-800-275-8777

UTILITIES

Contact your utility providers to confirm whether gas and electricity have been safely shut off and ask about billing adjustments if your apartment is not livable. When your apartment is legally uninhabitable, you are generally not responsible for ongoing utility charges during that period. For more information, contact:

- **Con Edison (Electric/Gas)** 1-800-752-6633 or visit <https://www.coned.com>
- **National Grid (Gas)** 718-643-4050 or visit <https://www.nationalgridus.com/>
- **Public Service Enterprise Group (PSEG)** 1-800-490-0025
<https://www.psegliny.com/>

Staying in Touch with Your Building and Going Home

KEEP YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION UPDATED

Make sure your landlord, HPD, and the Back Home Unit know how to reach you. They are required to notify you when the Vacate Order is lifted and you can return home.

STAY IN CONTACT WITH YOUR NEIGHBORS

Your neighbors are a critical resource of shared knowledge. If you are displaced from your building, your neighbors are likely in the same situation. Start a group chat – WhatsApp, Signal, Messaging, Email – and share information with one another regularly even as you are displaced to different parts of the city. The Vacate Order process can be confusing and hard to navigate and staying in contact with your neighbors will help you stay on top of it and make sure you all know when it is safe to return home.

STAY IN CONTACT WITH YOUR LANDLORD

Tenants should stay in contact with their landlords throughout the recovery process. Keep a record of all communications (i.e. text, email, etc.).

REGISTER WITH HPD EMERGENCY HOUSING SERVICES

Even if you arrange your own housing, and there is a Vacate Order from HPD, you should register with them and keep them updated on how to reach you. HPD will attempt to notify you if an HPD Vacate Order is rescinded. To reach **HPD Emergency Housing Services** call (212) 863-7660 or email ehs-remote@hpd.nyc.gov

Contact the Back Home Unit for Help

If you need help understanding next steps, coordinating with your landlord, or accessing any assistance, contact the Back Home Unit by calling (212) 389-6670, or via email at backhome@recovery.nyc.gov. The Back Home Unit is available for coordination and case management assistance.

A Vacate Order can be stressful, but you are not alone. City agencies are here to help you understand your rights, your options, and the steps you can take to move forward safely and with confidence.

Key Contacts and Resources

Category	Resource	Contact Information
Building Safety and Inspections	Department of Buildings (DOB) – building safety, inspections, and violations	(212) 566-5000 https://www.nyc.gov/buildings
	DOB Buildings Information System – online building records and permits	https://a810-bisweb.nyc.gov/bisweb/bsqpm01.jsp
	Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) – housing code enforcement	(212) 863-8300 https://www.nyc.gov/hpd
	HPD Online – online portal for complaints and building information	https://hpdonline.nyc.gov/hpdonline/
	Fire Department of New York (FDNY) – Bureau of Fire Prevention	Call: 311 or email FDNYBusiness-Support@fdny.nyc.gov
	FDNY Records Request – official FDNY records requests, including link to OpenRecords for FOIL requests	https://www.nyc.gov/site/fdny/about/resources/record-requests/records-request.page
	DEP Asbestos Control Program – asbestos compliance and oversight	(718) 595-3682
	Department of Health – air quality and asbestos information	https://www.nyc.gov/site/doh/health/health-topics/asbestos.page
Community and Nonprofit Resources	Churches United for Fair Housing – housing advocacy and support	https://www.cuffh.org
	Encore Community Services – community support programs	https://www.encorenyc.org
	Homebase – homelessness prevention services	https://www.nyc.gov/site/hra/help/homebase.page
Department of Education (DOE) Welcome Centers	District 7 Resource Center Bronx – District 7 501 Courtlandt Avenue, Room 106, Bronx, NY 10451	FordhamFWC@schools.nyc.gov
	Fordham Family Welcome Center Bronx – Districts 7, 9, 10 1 Fordham Plaza, 7th Floor, Bronx, NY 10458	FordhamFWC@schools.nyc.gov

Category	Resource	Contact Information
Department of Education (DOE) Welcome Centers <i>(continued)</i>	Zerega Family Welcome Center Bronx – Districts 8, 11, 12 1230 Zerega Avenue, Room 24, Bronx, NY 10462	ZeregaFWC@schools.nyc.gov
	89th Street Family Welcome Center Brooklyn – Districts 13, 15, 20, 21 415 89th Street, 4th Floor, Brooklyn, NY 11209	89thFWC@schools.nyc.gov
	Ocean Family Welcome Center Brooklyn – Districts 16, 17, 18, 22 1780 Ocean Avenue, 3rd Floor, Brooklyn, NY 11230	OceanFWC@schools.nyc.gov
	St. Marks Family Welcome Center Brooklyn – Districts 14, 19, 23, 32 1665 St Marks Avenue, Room 116, Brooklyn, NY 11233	StMarksFWC@schools.nyc.gov
	District 1 Family Resource Center Manhattan – District 1 166 Essex Street, New York, NY 10002	
	333 7th Avenue Family Welcome Center Manhattan – Districts 1, 2, 4 333 Seventh Avenue, 12th Floor, Room 1211, New York, NY 10001	333FWC@schools.nyc.gov
	Morningside Family Welcome Center Manhattan – Districts 3, 5, 6 123 Morningside Drive, Room 235, New York, NY 10027	MorningsideFWC@schools.nyc.gov
	Linden Family Welcome Center Queens – Districts 25, 26 30-48 Linden Place, 2nd Floor, Flushing, NY 11354	LindenFWC@schools.nyc.gov

Category	Resource	Contact Information
Department of Education (DOE) Welcome Centers <i>(continued)</i>	Queens Plaza North Family Welcome Center Queens – Districts 24, 30 28-11 Queens Plaza North, 3rd Floor, Long Island City, NY 11101	QueensPlazaNFWC@schools.nyc.gov
	Sutphin Family Welcome Center Queens – Districts 27, 28, 29 90-27 Sutphin Boulevard, 1st Floor, Jamaica, NY 11435	SutphinFWC@schools.nyc.gov
	Bay Street Family Welcome Center Staten Island – District 31 365 Bay Street, Room 102, Staten Island, NY 10301	BayStreetFWC@schools.nyc.gov
Emergency Housing and Shelter	Mayor’s Office of Housing Recovery Operations – Back Home Unit – case management for displaced residents	(212) 389-6670 backhome@recovery.nyc.gov
	FHEPS (Family Homelessness and Eviction Prevention Supplement) – emergency housing assistance.	https://www.nyc.gov/site/hra/help/fheps.page
	HPD Emergency Housing Services – emergency housing assistance	(212) 863-7660 ehs-remote@hpd.nyc.gov
	American Red Cross Disaster Services – emergency shelter and disaster relief	1 (877)733-2767 (Option 1)
	NYC Human Resources Administration (HRA) – benefits, cash assistance, and SNAP	(718) 557-1399 https://www.nyc.gov/hra
	NYC 311 – referrals for housing, repairs, violations, and legal help	Call: 311
Mental Health and Crisis Support	988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline – 24/7 crisis support	Call/Text: 988 https://988lifeline.org
Pets and Service Animals	Animal Care Centers of NYC	(212) 788-4000 https://www.nycacc.org
	ASPCA NYC – animal disaster response	(212) 876-7700

Category	Resource	Contact Information
Replacing Documents	NYC Birth Certificates – birth certificate replacement	https://www.nyc.gov/site/doh/services/birth-certificates.page
	Social Security Administration – SS card replacement and benefits	1 (800) 772-1213 https://www.ssa.gov
	DMV – replacement of driver’s license or state ID	https://dmv.ny.gov
	U.S. Passport Services – passport replacement	https://travel.state.gov
	USCIS – immigration document replacement	https://www.uscis.gov
	IDNYC – municipal ID services	Call: 311 https://www.nyc.gov/idnyc
Tenant Rights and Legal Help	DHCR / Office of Rent Administration – rent regulation and essential services for rent-stabilized and rent-controlled units	(833) 499-0343 rentinfo@hcr.ny.gov https://hcr.ny.gov/living-conditions-and-essential-services
	DSS’s Office of Civil Justice (OCJ) – Right to Counsel program	civiljustice@hra.nyc.gov
	Tenant Helpline – free legal services and tenant resources for eligible tenants	Call: 311 and ask for “Tenant Helpline”
	NYC Tenant Support Unit – assistance with tenant harassment and housing issues	https://www.nyc.gov/site/mayors-peu/programs/tenant-support-unit.page
Utilities and Mail	Con Edison – electric and gas services	1 (800) 752-6633 https://www.coned.com
	National Grid – gas services	(718) 643-4050
	USPS – mail forwarding and address changes	1-800-275-8777 https://moversguide.usps.com

CITY OF NEW YORK
MAYOR'S OFFICE TO PROTECT TENANTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF HOUSING RECOVERY OPERATIONS
– BACK HOME UNIT
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT
DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING PRESERVATION
AND DEVELOPMENT
DEPARTMENT OF BUILDINGS
311 | NYC.GOV