

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
December 29, 2005  
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**Where there's smoke, there's CRDN of Maine.**

The firefighters said they'd never seen so much inky black smoke from such a relatively small house fire. At eleven that morning a fire started in Mike and Suzanne deLesseps' kitchen and the smoke filled the house and poured out the windows. Everyone got out safely. The deLesseps watched as the Freeport, Maine firefighters put out the flames. There was structural damage, but it was the smoke that really made a huge mess.

Paul Metevier, Allstate's claims specialist assigned to the deLesseps case agreed. "This fire was probably one of the worst smoke-damage claims in my 28-year career, and all I do is fires."

Understandably, smoke has the unique ability to cause damage beyond the burned areas of a house fire. It makes its way from room to room, through the narrowest openings, seeping into bureau drawers and closets. Smoke damage also goes hand-in-hand with moisture damage – both stains and mildew – from the water used to extinguish the fire. Every year, this non-structural damage to clothing, drapes, and other fabrics resulting from fires costs property insurers close to \$3 billion in the US alone.

For the deLesseps, the damage was substantial. Their insurance company's first effort to set them up with a cleaner to try to salvage what clothing and other items they could turned frustrating and ultimately unsatisfactory.

The insurance company suggested the cleaner, Mr. deLesseps explained. "They told him to work with us, but when he showed up he wasn't really that interested in results. He took only a few things and blew off the rest as unsalvageable." Even then, the deLesseps were quite unhappy with his results, and unfortunately when garments are not properly processed, repairable damage often becomes permanent damage.

Mrs. deLesseps went to her local Pratt-Abbott Dry Cleaning store and asked if they knew of any fire and smoke damage specialists. Her timing was perfect, as Pratt-Abbott had recently become the Maine affiliate of CRDN, the Certified Restoration Drycleaning Network. CRDN is a national organization of highly skilled drycleaners who specialize in restoring clothing and other fabric items damaged by fires and floods.

"Even the smallest household fire can be catastrophic for fabrics and a major inconvenience for a homeowner," said Jim Machesney of CRDN of Maine.

“With CRDN’s comprehensive training, combined with the most advanced technology and processes, we’re quickly becoming known as the company to go to to solve these smoke and water damage problems,” added Machesney. “Specialized equipment and cleaning procedures enable us to restore even the most difficult items: suede, leather, sequined garments, purses, shoes, stuffed animals, intricate draperies, valances, and cornice boards. We understand the sentimental value of items such as wedding gowns and other heirlooms, and we have the ability to effectively remove odor, grime, mildew, and soot from those garments.”

In studying the components of wood smoke, the EPA found carbon monoxide, methane, VOCs, formaldehyde, benzene, acetic acid, formic acid, toluene, oxides of nitrogen, sulfur dioxide, organic carbon, and even traces of heavy metals. All of these harsh chemicals are contained in simple wood smoke. But residential fires generate all kinds of different smoke mixtures -- from plastics, fabrics, paints, insulation, and wiring. The result is smoke damage that is highly complex, often dangerously toxic, and very difficult to remove.

In addition, soot does not respond well to scrubbing. There is a high oil content in soot, due mostly to incomplete combustion of wood tars and petroleum-based materials. It’s extremely hard to remove from fabrics to begin with, and it is also very easy to damage fabrics further by forcing the soot deeper into the fibers either by improper handling or by using the wrong cleaning methods.

Odors are another tricky aspect of restoration. Treating odors requires that garments go through a deodorizing process even before cleaning; otherwise the smoke odor can be “set” into the fabric permanently.

In order to remove both the soot and the odor properly, the CRDN method employs chemical counteractants such as ozone decontamination and electronic deodorizing that actually break the soot molecules apart so they can be removed effectively.

Paul Metevier was relieved to learn that CRDN could succeed where the first restoration company had struck out. “When the deLesseps checked with Pratt-Abbott and learned about CRDN of Maine, it was a whole different experience,” he explained. “It was like night and day. Jim Machesney and the people at CRDN were very professional. They had everything cleaned, they saved a lot of stuff, got rid of the smell, and restored them easily for a tenth of what we would have paid in insurance.”

The financial impact of fire and water damage on the insurance industry and the nation’s economy is a staggering figure. Metevier said, “Years ago, the insurer paid the value of the item, and the value of clothing depreciates very quickly. But many property insurance policies today have what’s called a Replacement Cost Endorsements so that the insurance covers the full replacement cost of the item. At the end of the day, professional restoration services are a heck of a benefit to the insurer and to the homeowner.

Also for the customer, there's an intrinsic value in the familiarity of nicely broken in "comfort clothes" that is irreplaceable. Also as fashions come and go, replacing a particular style can be impossible. There were many damaged items in these categories for the deLesseps. "I had a coat that I bought at L.L. Bean," Mrs. deLesseps said "I knew I couldn't get another one just like it, but it came out just perfect."

In handling the deLesseps restoration project, CRDN of Maine took more than 300 damaged articles and succeeded in restoring better than 95% of them.

"Our position is to respond up front with the customer who wants options," Metevier said. "It's great to be able to recommend someone who's professional and can deal with the situation. I want to deal with can-do people and I'd think most adjusters are in the same position.

"I don't want to talk about stuff I can't do, I want to be able to go out and talk about what I can do. CRND of Maine was tremendous -- they're the ones I'm calling."

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