

# Prepare for Wildland Fire

## What to Do When It Happens

If you are at risk for wildland fire, you should:

- **Talk with members of your household about wildland fires – how to help prevent them and what to do if one occurs.**
- **Make sure that fire vehicles can get to your home by clearly marking all driveway entrances and displaying your name and address** and that the roads in/out or your community (including evacuation routes) are clearly marked. Make sure the driveway is wide enough to allow fire emergency vehicles easy access to the home with ample turnaround space. Keep the driveway in good condition. If you have a locked gate, make sure you have the county-required lockbox in place for the first responders.
- **Post fire emergency telephone numbers and evacuation routes by every phone in your home.** In a wildland fire, every second counts.
- **Plan and practice two ways out of your neighborhood.** Your primary route may be blocked; know another way out just in case.
- **Identify and maintain an adequate water source outside your home,** such as a small pond, cistern, well, swimming pool or hydrant. Keep a garden hose that is long enough to reach any area of the home and other structures on the property. Install freeze-proof exterior water outlets on at least two sides of the home and near other structures on the property. Install additional outlets at least 50 feet from the house. Firefighters may be able to use them.
- **Keep handy household items that can be used as fire tools:** a rake, ax, hand saw or chain saw, bucket and shovel. You may need to fight small fires before emergency responders arrive. Having this equipment will make your efforts more effective.
- **Develop a wildland fire-specific evacuation plan** and coordinate it with your Family Disaster Plan.

### **Protect Your Property**

If you live in an area at risk for wildland fire, you should:

- **Design and landscape your home and outbuildings with wildland fire safety in mind.** Obtain local building codes and weed-abatement ordinances for structures built near wooded areas. There may be restrictions on the types of material or plants allowed.
- **Select building materials and plants that can help resist fire** rather than fuel it. Use fire-resistant or noncombustible materials (tile, stucco, metal siding, brick, concrete block, or rock) on the roof and exterior structure of the dwelling. Treat wood or combustible materials used in roofs, siding, decking or trim with fire-retardant chemicals that have been listed by the Underwriter's Laboratory (UL) or other certification laboratory. Avoid using wooden shakes and shingles for a roof. Use only thick, tempered safety glass in large windows and sliding glass doors.

- **Have electrical lines installed underground.**
- **Create safety zones** to separate your home and outbuildings, such as barns, from plants and vegetation. Maintain the greatest distance possible between your home and materials that may burn in a wildland fire.
- **If your home sits on a steep slope**, standard protective measures may not suffice. Fire moves quickly up steep slopes. A larger safety zone may be necessary. Contact your local fire department or state foresters office for additional information.
- **Regularly clean roofs and gutters.** Remove all dead limbs, needles and debris that spread fire.
- **Equip chimneys and stovepipes with a spark arrester** that meets the requirements of National Fire Protection Association Standard 211. (Contact your local fire department for exact specifications.) This will reduce the chance of burning cinders escaping through the chimney.
- **Have a fire extinguisher (“A-B-C” rated) and get training from the fire department in how to use it.** Different extinguishers operate in different ways. There is no time to read instructions during an emergency, so know how to use it in advance.
- **Consider installing protective shutters or heavy fire-resistant drapes.** The extreme heat created by the fire causes windows to break, permitting burning cinders and superheated air to enter and ignite the interior of the building. The right shutters or drapes can reduce the potential for these cinders to cause your home to burn.
- **Keep a ladder handy that will reach the roof.** You may need to get on the roof to remove combustible debris.
- **Plant fire-resistant shrubs and trees in your safety zone** and on the remainder of your property. Fire-resistant plants are less likely to ignite and spread fire closer to your home. For example, hardwood trees are more fire-resistant than pine, evergreen eucalyptus or fir trees.
- **Create a defensible space around your home --- 100 foot perimeter.**
  - Clear all combustible vegetation and remove wooden lawn furniture to reduce the fuel load. Rake away leaves.
  - Remove leaves, rubbish, dead limbs, and twigs from under structures and dispose of them properly.
  - Have a professional tree service create a 15 ft. space between tree crowns and remove limbs within 10 ft. from the ground.
  - Remove dead branches from all trees.
  - Remove tree branches and shrubs within 15 ft. of a stovepipe or chimney outlet.
  - Remove vines from the walls of you home.
  - Mow grass regularly
- **If you have horses or livestock**, by sure to store hay and other burnable feed away from the building that houses the animals.
- **Keep tree limbs away from electrical wires.** Ask the power company to clear branches from power lines.
- **Place propane tanks at least 30 ft. from the home or other structures.** Clear a 10 ft. area around propane tanks.

- **Regularly dispose of newspapers and rubbish.**
- **Place stove, fireplace and grill ashes in a metal bucket**, soak in water for two days, and then bury the cold ashes in mineral soil. Once they are burned, chunks of flammable items can ignite at lower temperatures.
- **Stack firewood at least 30 ft. away and uphill from your home.** Clear combustible material within 20 ft. of the stack. Fire tends to travel uphill, so keep highly combustible firewood and other materials above your home.
- **Use only wood-burning devices that are listed by UL.**
- **Box eaves to prevent sparks** from entering the structure under the roof line.
- **Place metal screens over openings to prevent collection of litter.** Cover openings to windows, floors, roof and attic with screen (not vinyl screen). Use at least quarter-inch screen beneath porches, decks, floors and the home itself. Eighth- or sixteenth- inch mesh screen is better.
- **Avoid open burning completely**, especially during the fire season. Ash and cinders can float in the air and they may be blown into areas with heavy fuel load and start wildland fires.
- **Report hazardous conditions** that could cause a wildland fire. Community responders may be able to eliminate or reduce conditions that could cause fire.

## What to Do When Wildland Fire Threatens

### If there are reports of wildland fires:

- **Contact your immediate family members. Refer to your Family Communications Plan.** If they are in the neighborhood, have them return home; if they are away from the neighborhood, advise them of the situation and your plans.
- **If your family has an Evacuation Plan, find it and review it.** Review potential evacuation routes and safety zones with family members.
- **Confine pets to one room** so you can find them quickly if you need to leave.
- **Listen to local radio or TV stations or HAM Radios for updated emergency information. Follow instructions of local officials regarding the safest escape route.**
- If you have one, **turn on your FRS or GMRS Radio** and set it to your neighborhood's channel. Check in, and continue to monitor for new information.
- **If safe to do so, go outside to assess the situation. If you believe the fire is too close to your location, evacuate immediately or if necessary shelter in place.** Know the evacuation routes in your community; choose a route away from the fire and other potential hazards. If at all possible and practical, evacuate all of your animals.
- **Park your car in an open space, facing the direction of escape.** Leave the key in the ignition, roll up the windows and shut the car door and sunroof.
- **Open access gates to your property** while you still have time and electricity to operate automatic gates.

- **If time allows, arrange for temporary housing at a friend's or relative's home outside the threatened area.** You will be more comfortable in someone's home than in a public shelter and most shelters do not allow pets. Have a pre-arranged place for your large animals if possible.
- **Put your** Disaster Supply Kit in your car.
- **Place your short list of "must take" items** in your car.
  - Financial and insurance papers
  - Photo albums
  - Computer data backups
  - Irreplaceable artwork
- **Change into protective clothing:** sturdy shoes or boots, cotton or wool clothing, long pants, long-sleeved shirt, gloves and a handkerchief to protect your face. Wear goggles and a hard hat, if possible, and carry drinking water and a flashlight.
- **Evacuate large animals** or release them into a corral or pasture containing as little burnable material as possible. It may be too late to maneuver a trailer through slow traffic and thick smoke and a trailer may block incoming fire trucks. If you have too many large animals to evacuate and there is still time to do so, call your Large Animal Evacuation Group for assistance. They will be activated by the first responders, but a call to them might provide them more time to get to you.
- Consider evacuating early family members who will not be helping prepare your home and neighborhood for an evacuation.
- **Prepare your home:**
  - **Shut off gas / propane or any source of fuel.** Clear flammable materials from around propane tanks.
  - **Fuel and get ready any gas-powered pumps** or generators that run electric pumps that can be of assistance.
  - **Fill several garbage cans, tubs or other large containers with water. Soak several towels** to use in beating out embers or small fires.
  - **Connect garden hoses and place sprinklers within 50 feet of your home.**
  - **Place a ladder at a safe place to access the roof** to extinguish embers, fire brands or small spot fires.
  - **Open fireplace dampers. Close fireplace screens.**
  - **Remove lightweight drapes and curtains. Close windows, vents, doors blinds and heavy drapes.**
  - **Move combustible furniture into the center of the room,** away from windows and sliding-glass doors.
  - **Close all inside doors and windows, attics, eaves, vents and pet doors** to prevent drafts that could spread fire.
  - **Place valuables that will not be damaged by water in a pool or pond.**
  - **Seal attic and ground vents** with precut plywood or commercial seals.
  - **Remove combustible items** from around your home, lawn and poolside: patio furniture, umbrellas, tarp coverings, firewood. **Store in a detached garage or shed.**

- **Gather fire tools** (rakes, shovels, pruning saws, chain saws, buckets, brooms, hoes, hoses, nozzles) and make sure they are outside and easy to access.
- **Spray a wood shake roof with water.** If burning embers begin to fall on the roof and water supply and pressure are adequate, consider placing a lawn sprinkler on the roof to keep it moist.
- **Moisten brush, pine needles, or other small flammable objects on or close to the structure.** Use existing sprinklers to keep these fuels moist.
- **Watch for Changes in the Speed and Direction of Fire and Smoke.** Don't let the fire get ahead of you and block your route to safety. Be especially cautious if embers or burning wood begin to fall in your neighborhood.
- **If you didn't do so when the fire season began, do these now, if there is time:**
  - Clear roof and gutters of leaves and pine needles.
  - Clear leaves, dead limbs, twigs, brush and vegetation away from the structure.
  - Cut low-hanging branches and limbs that could act as ladders for the fire.
  - Remove leaves and rubbish from under your home and other structures.
  - Remove dead branches that extend over the roof.
  - Remove vines from the walls of the home.
  - Mow tall grass.
- **Join with Your Neighbors to Prepare Your Neighborhood**
  - **Activate your phone trees and turn on your FRS/GMRS Radios**
  - Establish lookouts to monitor the approaching fire.
  - Open fire and emergency access gates.
  - Alert neighbors to the approaching fire and inform them about recommended preparation activities. Brief them on neighborhood escape routes and safety zones.
  - Patrol for spot fires. Extinguish small fires and report all spot fires.
  - Move parked vehicles from areas with narrow passage.
  - Assist neighbors who have special needs to prepare for an evacuation.
  - Report to your neighbors about changing conditions: smoke, ash, embers, changes in wind speed or direction, spot fires, approaching flame fronts. If you have FRS/GMRS radios in your community, you can communicate efficiently to many at the same time.