

Wildland Fires Developing a Fire Plan

Elements of the plan:

- **Evacuation Plan.** Early evacuation is the safest way to avoid injury or death. Timing and other factors can vary so widely that each household needs its own specific plan, including options to cover anything that might happen.
- **Escape Routes.** Normal and alternate escape routes.
- **Safety Zones.** Locations of and routes to large areas with little or no vegetation or other fuels where family members can ride out the fire, if it's too late to evacuate.
- **Communication.** Pre-arrange normal and alternate ways to stay in touch with family members, even if phones are out. Family members might "check in" with a friend or relative in another area as soon as they are able.
- **Assignments.** Who is to do what when an emergency occurs.

Provide Equipment:

- **Hoses.** Pre-connected to faucets.
- **Ladder.** Long enough to reach the roof easily.
- **Fire Extinguishers.** One or more 5-pound multipurpose type, readily available.
- **Protective Clothing.** For anyone who is unable to evacuate before the fire arrives. This includes a cotton long-sleeved shirt or jacket and trousers, a handkerchief to provide minimum protection for the lungs (avoid inhaling smoke or hot gases), leather boots, gloves, a helmet or other head covering and goggles. Cotton clothing is a "must." Synthetic fabrics can melt onto your skin.

When Caught in Wildfire:

If you see a wildfire, call 9-1-1 immediately. Don't assume that someone else has already called. Describe the location of the fire, speak slowly and clearly, and answer any questions asked by the dispatcher.

Before the Fire Approaches Your House:

- **Evacuate.** Evacuate your pets and all family members who are not essential to preparing the home. Anyone with medical or physical limitations, the young and the elderly, should be evacuated immediately.
- **Wear protective clothing.**

- **Remove combustibles.** Clear items that will burn from around the house, including woodpiles, lawn furniture, barbecue grills, tarp coverings, etc. Move them outside of your defensible space.
- **Close/protect openings.** Close outside attic, eaves and basement vents, windows, doors, pet doors, etc. Remove flammable drapes and curtains. Close all shutters, blinds or heavy non-combustible window coverings to reduce radiant heat.
- **Close inside doors/open damper.** Close all doors inside the house to prevent draft. Open the damper on your fireplace, but close the fireplace screen.
- **Shut off gas.** Shut off any natural gas, propane or fuel oil supplies at the source.
- **Water.** Connect garden hoses. Fill any pools, hot tubs, garbage cans, tubs or other large containers with water.
- **Pumps.** If you have gas-powered pumps for water, make sure they are fueled and ready.
- **Ladder.** Place a ladder against the house in clear view.
- **Car.** Back your car into the driveway and roll up the windows.
- **Garage doors.** Disconnect any automatic garage door openers so that doors can still be opened by hand if the power goes out. Close all garage doors.
- **Valuables.** Place valuable papers, mementos and anything “you can’t live without” inside the car in the garage, ready for quick departure. Any pets still with you should also be put in the car.

Preparing to Leave:

- **Lights.** Turn on outside lights and leave a light on in every room to make the house more visible in heavy smoke.
- **Don’t Lock Up.** Leave doors and windows closed but unlocked. It may be necessary for firefighters to gain quick entry into your home to fight fire.

Survival In A Vehicle:

- **This is dangerous and should only be done in an emergency,** but you can survive the firestorm if you stay in your car. It is much less dangerous than trying to run from a fire on foot.
- Roll up the windows and close the air vents. Drive slowly with headlights on. Watch for other vehicles and pedestrians. Do not drive through heavy smoke.
- If you have to stop, park away from the heaviest trees and brush. Turn headlights on and ignition off. Roll up windows and close air vents.
- Get on the floor and cover up with a blanket or coat.

- Stay in the vehicle until the main fire passes.
- **Stay in the car.** Do not run your engine, it may stall and not restart. Air currents may rock the car. Some smoke and sparks may enter the vehicle. Temperature inside the vehicle will increase. Metal gas tanks and containers rarely explode.

If You Are Trapped At Home:

- **Stay calm.** As the fire front approaches, go inside the house. You can survive inside. The fire will pass before your house burns down.

After The Fire Passes:

- **Check the roof immediately.** Put out any roof fires, sparks, or embers. Check the attic for hidden burning sparks.
- If you have a fire, get your neighbors to help fight it.
- The water you put into your pool or hot tub and other containers will come in handy now. If the power is out, try connecting a hose to the outlet on your water heater.
- **For several hours after the fire, maintain a "fire watch."** Re-check for smoke and sparks throughout the house.

If Caught In The Open:

- The best temporary shelter is in a sparse fuel area. On a steep mountainside, the backside is safer. Avoid canyons.
- If a road is nearby, lie face down along the road cut or in a ditch on the uphill side. Cover yourself with anything that will shield you from the fire's heat.
- If hiking in the backcountry, seek a depression with sparse fuel. Clear fuel away from the area while the fire is approaching and then lie face down in the depression and cover yourself. Stay down until after the fire passes.

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Defensible Space Diagram

You must create defensible space around your home. Defensible space is an area 30 feet or more around your home that is kept free of features that tend to increase the risk of your home being destroyed. The following are the 10 steps to defensible space.

