

WILDFIRES

A PREPAREDNESS GUIDE

2017 witnessed an unusually large number of wildfires. If you live in an area where wildfires can occur, you need to be ready. For example, in California, about two million acres—the area of Rhode Island and Delaware combined—have burned. The death and property loss tolls have been catastrophic.

This guide is a summary of the best advice on measures you can take to protect your home, yourself and your family from wildfires. In the event of a general conflagration, there is not much you can do other than evacuate the area. There are, however, measures you can take to stay safe and mitigate fire danger and damage to your home and business.

ABOUT WILDFIRES



A wildfire is an unplanned and unwanted fire burning in a forest, grassland, or prairie. It can start from natural causes, like lightning, but humans cause most wildfires through carelessness or arson. Wildfires can break out anywhere. They can rage in remote wilderness, national parks, or in backyards. Although the potential for wildfires is greatest during drought and warmer weather, wildfires can happen at any time. Contributing to the danger are high winds that can cause wildfires to spread across large areas quickly. Check your local community's website or office of public safety to find out if you have a designated wildfire season.

humidity, and temperature), and fuel (debris and dry vegetation) in their path.

The only wildfire factor you can influence is fuel.

Debris—dead leaves, pine needles left on decks, in gutters, and across lawns—can catch fire from blowing embers. If your home has flammable features, it can catch fire and can play a part in igniting surrounding homes and structures. Again, it is not where a home is located; rather, the landscaping around it.

Ignition zones are key.

Firefighters refer to a home's ignition zones as those areas where your home is more susceptible to wildfire danger. Here are your home's ignition zones and steps you need to take before a wildfire approaches:

PROTECTING YOUR HOME OR BUSINESS

During a wildfire, firefighters can be stretched to the limit. Fire officials must make quick decisions on what property they can defend. Help may not be immediately available. Important: Home and business owners must take responsibility for preventative actions to mitigate property loss and keep employees and family members safe.

It's not just location.

When it comes to risk during a wildfire, it is the conditions, not the location, that determine potential danger. Wildfires are governed by the lie of the land (topography), the weather (winds,

1. **The home zone.** That is the home itself and anything within five feet of your foundation. Take these precautions at the home zone:

- Harden your home against wildfire with fences, decks, porches and other attachments constructed of low-flammability or non-flammable material.
- Keep plantings, debris and wooden mulch out of the home zone.
- Keep your roof, gutters and decking clear of leaves, pine needles, and other burnable materials.
- Make sure any vents or other home openings are protected from ember penetration by screens or other coverings.



2. **From 5 to 30 feet.** This should be a well-irrigated area around your home. It includes decks and fences, and it gives you space to use equipment to suppress the fire. Take these steps:
 - Keep your lawn mowed, irrigated, and well maintained. Dry grass burns quickly and can spread flames to your home's perimeter.
 - Limit plantings to low flammability and well-spaced species.
 - Consider replacing mulch with hardscaping—rocks, gravel, or stone.
 - Do not stack firewood in this area. Move firewood supplies to the 30- to 100-foot barrier.
3. **From 30 feet to 100 feet.** This area should be reserved for low flammability plant materials. Do the following:
 - Plant low-growing species and use an irrigation system.
 - Create a separation between your grass, shrubs and trees to prevent a fire from climbing into taller vegetation.
 - Space trees to prevent their crowns from touching.
4. **From 100 feet outward.** If your property line extends that far, this is the place for well-spaced trees and other low-growing plants. The goal is to keep the volume of vegetation low.

WORKING AND COOPERATING WITH NEIGHBORS

If your home's ignition zone overlaps your neighbors, you could ignite other structures located less than 100 feet away. Neighbors must work together and seek assistance from local fire services for greater wildfire safety. Cooperative efforts, among other things, can result in additional safety measures such as:

- Homes and neighborhoods with legible and clearly marked street signs
- Multiple escape routes away from the neighborhood for safe evacuation
- Phone and texting networks to alert residents
- Ensuring your homeowner association enforces wildfire safety measures
- For a detailed guide and advice on how residents can play a major role in protecting against wildfires, download the Firewise Toolkit from www.firewise.org/wildfire-preparedness.aspx.



BEFORE THE FIRE

WHEN THE FIRE WEATHER WATCH OR WARNING IS IN EFFECT

If you live in a drought area or a place where your property is vulnerable to brush or forest fires, you may be subject to fire weather watches or warnings. When a fire weather watch is set, dangerous fire weather conditions are imminent or possible over the next 12 to 72 hours. When you receive a TV, radio, or reverse 911 call to leave, do not delay. You and your family may have short notice to leave when fire conditions worsen.

While there is time, do the following:

1. Gather or replenish an emergency kit to include:
 - Cash
 - A flashlight with extra batteries
 - Drinking water and snacks
 - Extra clothing and blankets
 - Pet food and toys
 - First-aid
 - A 72-hour supply of important medications
2. Shut off your home's gas/electrical power.
3. Choose and segregate the important personal documents (e.g., insurance papers and irreplaceable photos) you must take with you.
4. Bring in lawn and deck furniture, doormats, etc., to safeguard against ember ignition.
5. Remove portable propane tanks from outside the home.
6. Put a ladder against the house for the fire department
7. Connect your garden hose for firefighters.
8. Close all windows and doors, including the garage door.
9. Close any windows on vehicles you will leave behind.
10. Call your family or friends and notify them of your plans.

**PREPARE
IF YOU
HAVE
TIME**

**Pack
Necessities**



Power Down



Grab Papers



Clear the Decks



Place a Ladder



Prepare Hose



Batten Down



Keep in Touch



DURING THE FIRE



TAKE THESE STEPS AS THE WILDFIRE APPROACHES:

- Be ready to evacuate without delay and on short notice.
 - Obey an evacuation notice or order, even if it is only "voluntary."
 - If you see a wildfire but have not received evacuation notice, call 911. Never assume that someone else has already reported the fire.
 - Proceed along a pre-planned, safe evacuation route.
- idea; intense heat will create steam.)
 - If flames approach your vehicle, try to park in an area clear of debris, such as a clearing, rocky area, parking lot, etc.
 - Avoid the impulse to open the door and flee. You will not be able to outrun the flames.
 - Leave the engine running and get as low in the car as possible below the windows.
 - Remain calm and do not leave the vehicle until the fire has passed.

IF YOU ARE CAUGHT OUT IN THE OPEN IN YOUR CAR

People have perished in vehicles while fleeing wildfires, which is why when told to evacuate, you need to go immediately while there is still time. You cannot outrun a leapfrogging, hopscotching wildfire, and the



driving conditions could be dangerous and difficult. Have a backup route in mind before you leave. If you see smoke, turn around and head the other way.

DO NOT LEAVE YOUR VEHICLE UNTIL THE FIRE HAS PASSED.

However, if you do get caught in the open while in your vehicle, it is important to remain calm and take the following measures:

- Roll up your windows and turn on the AC to the recirculation mode.
- Drive slowly with headlights and hazard lights on.
- Cover your face and any exposed skin with a dry fabric. (Wetting fabrics is a bad

AFTER THE FIRE

Wait until authorities say it is safe before trying to return to your property. Then take the following measures:

- Keep a "fire watch" to safeguard against sparks or hidden embers reigniting the fire.
- Check and recheck the roof, attic and other hidden areas for remaining embers.
- Look for hazards in burned areas, including hot spots, which can flare up suddenly.
- If you smell smoke, leave the premises immediately.
- Do not turn on the utilities without supervision or permission from the power companies.

THE CLEANUP

Your cleanup, unfortunately, might consist of merely photographing the ashes of your home for insurance purposes. However, if your home survived without major structural damage, and authorities tell you it is safe to enter for cleanup, take the following

precautions while cleaning up the fire damage:

- Wear a NIOSH-certified respirator or dust mask.
- Wet down debris to minimize breathing dust particles.
- Throw out any food that was exposed to heat, smoke, or soot.
- If you think your water supply has been contaminated, do not use it to prepare food, wash dishes, wash hands, brush teeth, make ice, or to prepare baby formula.
- Be careful where you step. Look for floorboard and overhead fire damage.
- Photograph and record damage and losses for your insurance company.

A PLAYBOOK FOR EMPLOYERS



As part of your businesses emergency planning program, download FEMA's Prepare Your Organization for a Wildfire Playbook from the media library at fema.gov. This publication is a valuable resource

for wildfire planning. It provides a three-step approach for employers to:

1. Prepare your people with a meaningful, scripted discussion on wildfire dangers. It includes a scripted guide along with downloadable materials on wildfire preparedness.
2. Prepare your organization with a table-top exercise. (A table-top exercise simulates

an actual event, but in a low-stress, consequence-free environment.) This section includes suggested wildfire scenarios, along with facilitator guides.

3. Maintain the readiness momentum year-round. This section has a list of resources and publications by FEMA, the American Red Cross, and others to both augment and keep your emergency preparedness moving.

CONCLUSIONS

In this guide, we presented what you need to know about wildfires and the steps you should take before, during, and after life-threatening conflagrations. The emphasis here is on "life-threatening." Your main takeaway from this guide should be that wildfires are not like hurricanes. You cannot ride them out in deep shelter. When you get the word to evacuate, leave immediately.

There are steps, however, that you can take to minimize the chances your home or business will burn. Likewise, employers can take measures to prepare their people and their organization for a cataclysmic wildfire. FEMA's playbook is an outstanding resource.

This guide is sponsored by the Mead Group and its partner Nexis Response. Look for a downloadable copy on our website at nexusprep.com and meadgroup.com.

SOURCES:

<http://www.nfpa.org/News-and-Research/Fire-statistics-and-reports/Fire-statistics/Fires-in-the-US>
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BUSINESSES SHOULD CONSULT FEMA'S PREPARE YOUR ORGANIZATION FOR A WILDFIRE PLAYBOOK