

2022 Wildfire Preparedness

Wildfire season 2022 is upon us kicking off with many large brush/wildland fires across the state. So here is a little reminder to help prepare your home for a potential wildfire.

Just as you must prepare for hurricane season, you must also prepare for the potential of a wildfire. To prepare for the fight first you must first know your enemy. Let me introduce you to your enemy wildfire.

What is a wildfire? Wikipedia defines a wildfire as; an **unplanned, unwanted or uncontrolled fire** in an area of combustible vegetation starting in rural or urban areas. While there are many names for wildfires, wildfire, brushfire, wildland fire, rural fire, grass fire, or forest fire, they all are out of control fires that destroy property and have the potential to take lives. These devastating fires can be started accidentally by car fires, engine sparks, equipment malfunctions, cigarette butts, unattended yard debris fires or in the case of wildfire arson intentionally started by a human. On the East Coast of the United States, studies have shown that **wildfire arson** is the leading cause of forest fires.

Although the wildfires caused by lightning, tend to be slightly larger and burn more acreage, 55% of the average acreage burned from 2016 to 2020 was ignited by lightning. From 2016 to 2020, on average a whopping, 88% of wildfires were caused either accidentally or intentionally by humans. So, to help protect your home create a **defensible space** of 30 feet around you home. Reducing the fuel within 30 feet of a structure can make a significant difference in whether it survives a wildfire. Reducing fuel within the defensible space means creating a landscape that breaks up the continuity of brush and other vegetation that could bring wildfire in contact with any flammable portion of the structure.

Reduce the fuel by; eliminating any flammable vegetation in contact with the structure, thinning out trees and shrubs so there is 10 to 15 feet between the tree crowns, pruning tree limbs to a height of 6 to 10 feet, replacing highly flammable landscape material with plant materials having a higher water content, replacing flammable mulch adjacent to the structure with gravel or rock, and eliminating "ladder fuels" near the structure that might carry a surface fire to the roof or eaves.

Keep your roof and gutters free of leaves and pine stray. Do not landscape around your home with **Tinder**. Wait, what is tinder you ask? Good ole Wikipedia defines tinder as a noun meaning, a dry, flammable material, such as wood or paper, used for lighting a fire. A good example of tinder is the pine straw or wood chips used to landscape around our homes, see the problem now? Let us be wildfire smart and use rock or gravel to landscape around our homes. Maintain a defensible space of 30 feet around your home.

Just as with hurricane preparations, homeowners must assume a major role in wildfire protection by taking action to reduce the ignitability of their homes before the threat of a wildfire. It is not a matter of if we are going to have wildfires, but when we will have wildfires and at what intensity.

Before a wildfire threatens your area...

In and around your home

- Clear leaves and other debris from gutters, eaves, porches and decks. This prevents embers from igniting your home.
- Remove dead vegetation and other items from under your deck or porch, and within 10 feet of the house. Learn more about the [basics of defensible space](#) on the Firewise website.
- Screen or box-in areas below patios and decks with wire mesh to prevent debris and combustible materials from accumulating.
- Remove flammable materials (firewood stacks, propane tanks) within 30 feet of your home's foundation and outbuildings, including garages and sheds. If it can catch fire, don't let it touch your house, deck or porch.
- Wildfire can spread to treetops. Prune trees so the lowest branches are 6 to 10 feet from the ground.
- Keep your lawn hydrated and maintained. If it is brown, cut it down to reduce fire intensity. Dry grass and shrubs are fuel for wildfire.
- Don't let debris and lawn cuttings linger. Dispose of these items quickly to reduce fuel for fire.
- Inspect shingles or roof tiles. Replace or repair those that are loose or missing to prevent ember penetration.
- Cover exterior attic vents with metal wire mesh no larger than 1/8 inch to prevent sparks from entering the home.
- Enclose under-eave and soffit vents or screens with metal mesh to prevent ember entry.
- Learn more about how to protect your home and property at www.firewise.org.

Creating an emergency plan

- Assemble an emergency supply kit and place it in a safe spot. Remember to include important documents, medications and personal identification.
- Develop an emergency evacuation plan and practice it with everyone in your home.
- Plan two ways out of your neighborhood and designate a meeting place.
- Learn more about emergency preparedness planning on NFPA's [emergency planning](#) webpage.

In your community:

- Contact your local planning/zoning office to find out if your home is in a high wildfire risk area, and if there are specific local or county ordinances you should be following.
- If you are part of a homeowner association, work with them to identify regulations that incorporate proven preparedness landscaping, home design and building material use.
- Talk to your local fire department about how to prepare, when to evacuate, and the response you and your neighbors can expect in the event of a wildfire.
- Learn about wildfire risk reduction efforts, including how land management agencies use prescribed fire to manage local landscapes.
- Learn how you can make a positive difference in your community.

Michele Steinberg of NFPA's Wildland Fire Operations Division provides seven tips to help keep homes from igniting in a wildfire.

During the time a wildfire is in your area...

- Stay aware of the latest news and updates from your local media and fire department. Get your family, home and pets prepared to evacuate.
- Place your emergency supply kit and other valuables in your vehicle.
- Move patio or deck furniture, cushions, door mats and potted plants in wooden containers either indoors or as far away from the home, shed and garage as possible.
- Close and protect your home's openings, including attic and basement doors and vents, windows, garage doors and pet doors to prevent embers from penetrating your home.
- Connect garden hoses and fill any pools, hot tubs, garbage cans, tubs, or other large containers with water. Firefighters have been known to use the hoses to put out fires on rooftops.
- Leave as early as possible, before you're told to evacuate. Do not linger once evacuation orders have been given. Promptly leaving your home and neighborhood clears roads for firefighters to get equipment in place to fight the fire, and helps ensure residents' safety.

After a wildfire has been contained...

- Continue to listen to news updates for information about the fire. Return home only when authorities say it is safe.
- Visit [FEMA/Ready.gov](https://www.fema.gov/ready) for more information regarding wildfire after an emergency.

However, no matter how responsible we are, no matter how much we prepare, wildfires still happen. Unlike a hurricane we do not get days' notice of a wildfire. Action in the form of preparation must be taken before wildfire threatens.

Richard Meuth, Fire Chief
Woodville Volunteer Fire Department