

# FACT SHEET



Federal Emergency Management Agency

## WILDLAND FIRES

The threat of wildland fires for people living near wildland areas or using recreational facilities in wilderness areas is real. Advance planning and knowing how to protect buildings in these areas can lessen the devastation of a wildland fire.

Learn and teach safe fire practices.

- Build fires away from nearby trees or bushes.
- Always have a way to extinguish the fire quickly and completely.
- Never leave a fire — even a cigarette — burning unattended.

Obtain local building codes and weed abatement ordinances for structures built near wooded areas.

Use fire-resistant materials when building, renovating, or retrofitting structures.

Create a safety zone to separate the home from combustible plants and vegetation.

- Stone walls can act as heat shields and deflect flames.
- Swimming pools and patios can be a safety zone.

Check for fire hazards around home.

- Install electrical lines underground, if possible. Keep all tree and shrub limbs trimmed so they don't come in contact with the wires.

■ Prune all branches around the residence to a height of 8 to 10 feet. Keep trees adjacent to buildings free of dead or dying wood and moss.

- Remove all dead limbs, needles and debris from rain gutters.
- Store combustible or flammable materials in approved safety containers and keep them away from the house.
- Keep chimney clean.
- Avoid open burning completely, and especially during dry season.

Install smoke detectors on every level of your home and near sleeping areas.

Make evacuation plans.

Plan several routes in case the fire blocks escape route.

Have disaster supplies on hand.

- Flashlight with extra batteries
- Portable, battery-operated radio and extra batteries
- First aid kit and manual
- Emergency food and water
- Nonelectric can opener
- Essential medicines
- Cash and credit cards
- Sturdy shoes

Develop an emergency communication plan.

In case family members are separated from one another during a wildland fire (a real possibility during the day when adults are at work and children are at school), have a plan for getting back together.

Ask an out-of-state relative or friend to serve as the "family contact." After a disaster, it's often easier to call long distance. Make sure everyone knows the name, address, and phone number of the contact person.

### Fire-Resistant Building Materials

Avoid using wooden shakes and shingles for a roof. Use tile, stucco, metal siding, brick, concrete block, rock, or other fire-resistant materials. Use only thick, tempered safety glass in large windows and sliding glass doors.

Contact your local emergency management office or American Red Cross chapter for more information on wildland fires.

Turn on a battery-operated radio to get the latest emergency information.

Remove combustible items from around the house.

- Lawn and poolside furniture
- Umbrellas
- Tarp coverings
- Firewood

Take down flammable drapes and curtains and close all venetian blinds or noncombustible window coverings.

Take action to protect your home.

- Close all doors and windows inside your home to prevent draft.
- Close gas valves and turn off all pilot lights.
- Turn on a light in each room for visibility in heavy smoke.
- Place valuables that will not be damaged by water in a pool or pond.
- If hoses and adequate water are available, leave sprinklers on roofs and anything that might be damaged by fire.

Be ready to evacuate all family members and pets when fire nears or when instructed to do so by local officials.

Take care when re-entering a burned wildland area. Hot spots can flare up without warning.

Check the roof immediately and extinguish any sparks or embers.

Check the attic for hidden burning sparks.

For several hours afterward, re-check for smoke and sparks throughout the home.

### Mitigation

Mitigation includes any activities that prevent an emergency, reduce the chance of an emergency happening, or lessen the damaging effects of unavoidable emergencies. Investing in preventive mitigation steps now such as installing a spark arrestor on your chimney, cleaning roof surfaces and gutters regularly and using only fire-resistant materials on the exterior of your home, will help reduce the impact of wildland fires in the future. For more information on mitigation, contact your local emergency management office.

### If Trapped in a Wildland Fire

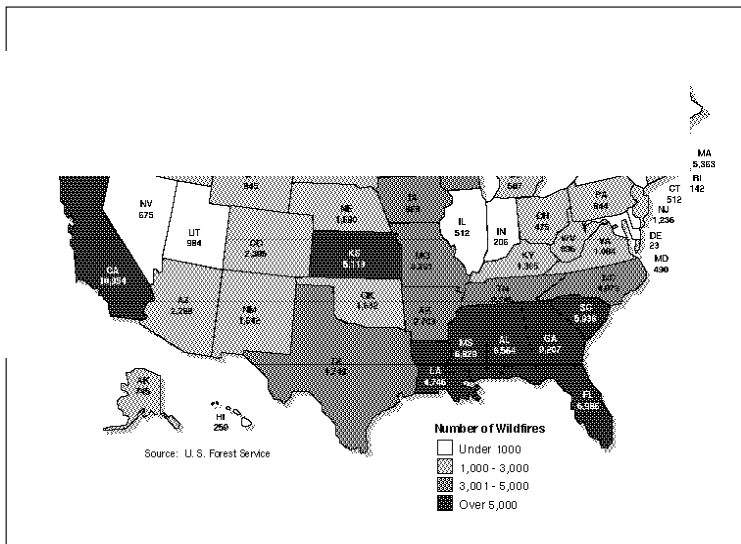
You cannot outrun a fire. Crouch in a pond or river. Cover head and upper body with wet clothing. If water is not around, look for shelter in a cleared area or among a bed of rocks. Lie flat and cover body with wet clothing or soil. Breathe the air close to the ground through a wet cloth to avoid scorching lungs or inhaling smoke.

# BACKGROUND

## WILDLAND FIRES

### EMERGENCY INFORMATION

1. As residential areas expand into relatively untouched wildlands, people living in these communities are increasingly threatened by forest fires. Protecting structures in the wildland from fire poses special problems, and can stretch firefighting resources to the limit.
2. If heavy rains follow a major fire, other natural disasters can occur, including landslides, mudflows, and floods. Once ground cover has been burned away, little is left to hold soil in place on steep slopes and hillsides.
3. A major wildland fire can leave a large amount of scorched and barren land. These areas may not return to prefire conditions for decades. If the wildland destroyed the ground cover, then erosion becomes one of several potential problems.



### WHAT IS A WILDLAND FIRE?

There are three different classes of wildland fires. A surface fire is the most common type and burns along the floor of a forest, moving slowly and killing or damaging trees. A ground fire is usually started by lightning and burns on or below the forest floor. Crown fires spread rapidly by wind and move quickly by jumping along the tops of trees. Wildland fires are usually signaled by dense smoke that fills the area for

Danger zones include all wooded, brush, and grassy areas especially those in Kansas, Mississippi, Louisiana, Georgia, Florida, the Carolinas, Tennessee, California, Massachusetts, and the national forests of the western United States.

## HELP YOUR COMMUNITY GET READY

The media can raise awareness about wildland fires by providing important information to the community. Here are some suggestions:



1. Publish a special section with emergency information about wildland fires. Localize the information by printing the phone numbers of local emergency services offices, the American Red Cross and hospitals. Report the areas most at risk from wildland fires and let people know of the advantages of creating a fire safety zone around structures and of using fire-resistant roofing materials when building or reroofing.

2. Work with local emergency services and American Red Cross officials to prepare special reports for people with mobility problems on what to do if an evacuation is ordered.



3. Print local building codes and weed abatement ordinances for structures built near wooded areas.



4. Report on the advantages of regular chimney sweepings.

5. Periodically inform your community of local public warning systems.

## DID YOU KNOW . . .

■ Greater than four out of every five forest fires are started by people. Negligent human behavior such as smoking in forested areas or improperly extinguishing campfires are the cause of many fires. The other cause of forest fires is lightning.

■ A prescribed fire is a fire that is purposely ignited by land management agencies under controlled conditions for specific management objectives.

■ The 1991 wildland fires in Oakland, California, caused 26 deaths and 148 injuries. The fires destroyed over 3,000 structures, left 5,000 people

homeless, and resulted in \$1.5 billion in damages.

■ In 1990, hot, dry weather conditions in California contributed to brush fires in Santa Barbara County that destroyed 600 buildings, caused over \$200 million of damage and killed one person.

■ The greater Yellowstone National Park fire of 1988 destroyed or damaged private structures including 17 mobile homes, 4 dwellings, a general store, 12 garages and outbuildings, 19 cabins, and several storage structures, and burned 1,210,730 acres of wildland.

## HOW THE PUBLIC CAN HELP AFTER A DISASTER

When disaster strikes, people everywhere want to help those in need. To ensure that this compassion and generosity are put to good use, the media can highlight these facts:

▶ Financial aid is an immediate need of disaster victims. Financial contributions should be made through a recognized voluntary organization to help ensure that contributions are put to their intended use.

▶ Before donating food or clothing, wait for instructions from local officials. Immediately after a disaster, relief workers usually don't have the time or facilities to setup distribution channels, and too often these items go to waste.

▶ Volunteers should go through a recognized voluntary agency such as the American Red Cross or Salvation Army. They know what is needed and are prepared to deal with the need. Local emergency services officials also coordinate volunteer efforts for helping in disasters.

▶ Organizations and community groups wishing to donate items should first contact local officials, the American Red Cross, or Salvation Army to find out what is needed and where to send it. Be prepared to deliver the items to one place, tell officials when you'll be there, and provide for transportation, driver, and unloading.

