

Dealing with Wildfires...



a Guide for Coloradans



**American
Red Cross**



Allstate.
You're in good hands.

A Note to Colorado Residents:

*In Colorado, wildfires pose a perpetual threat to our treasured way of life. Dry forests and intense weather conditions continue to threaten our properties. However, here are many actions that Coloradans can take to safeguard our homes, properties, and even our lives. This guide serves as a quick reference guide and checklist, so that you, as a Colorado resident, can **TAKE ACTION** to better protect you and your family from wildfires. It is designed to meet your needs whether you are preparing your home, being threatened by wildfire, are being asked to evacuate your home, or returning after the fire.*

Table of Contents

Preparing Your Family for Wildfires	3
Preparing Your Home For Wildfires	5
Understanding Defensible Space	5
Reducing Fire Hazards	9
What to Do When Wildfire Threatens	11
What to Do If Evacuation Is Necessary	12
What to Do After a Wildfire	12
Internet Resources	14



Preparing Your Family for Wildfires

Develop a Family Disaster Plan. Develop a “wildfire” specific plan. **Learn about your area’s wildfire risk.**

Contact your local fire department, forestry service, or any other relevant emergency response agency for information on fire laws and wildfire risk.

If you are at risk from wildfire:

- Plan your water needs.** Sometimes you may be able to fight small fires, preventing them from becoming larger or delaying their effects until emergency responders with appropriate materials arrive on the scene.
- Identify and maintain an emergency water source such as a small pond, cistern, well, water tank, or hydrant.** Consider obtaining a gasoline powered water pump that firefighters could utilize while electrical power is out.
- 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 home.
- Develop an evacuation plan.** Everyone in your family should know where to go if they have to leave. Trying to make plans at the last minute can be upsetting and create confusion.
- Plan for the needs of your pets.** This should include an evacuation kit with water, food, toys, a leash and any other item that is necessary for your pet if you must leave your home. Make a list of the pet friendly hotels or friends/family that might take your pets.
- Discuss wildfire with your family.** Everyone should know what to do in case all family members are not together. Discussing wildfire ahead of time will help reduce fear and anxiety, and lets everyone know how to respond.

Disaster / Evacuation Supplies Kit

Place in an easy-to-carry container the supplies you would likely need if you were to be away from home for several days. Label the container clearly. Remember to include:

- A portable, battery powered radio or television and extra batteries.
- Flashlight with extra batteries.
- First aid kit with manual.
- Supply of prescription medication.
- Credit Card and Cash.
- Personal Identification.
- An extra set of vehicle keys.
- Map of area and phone numbers of places you could go.
- Special needs, for example, diapers or formula, medications/ copies of prescriptions, eyeglasses or other physical needs.

Evacuation Specific Supplies

- One gallon of water per person, per day.
- Three day supply of non-perishable food.
- Kitchen accessories: manual can opener; mess kits or paper cups, plates, and plastic/disposable utensils; utility knife; household liquid bleach to treat drinking water; sugar; salt; pepper; aluminum foil; plastic resealable bags.
- One complete change of clothing and footwear for each family member, sturdy shoes or work boots, raingear, hat and gloves, thermal underwear, sunglasses.
- Blankets or sleeping bag for each family member.
- Tools and other accessories: paper, pencil; needles and thread; pliers, wrench, shovels; tape; medicine dropper; whistle; plastic sheeting; small canister, A-B-C type fire extinguisher; emergency preparedness manual; tube tent; compass.
- Sanitation and hygiene items: toilet paper, towelettes; soap, hand sanitizer, liquid detergent; feminine supplies; personal items such as shampoo, deodorant, toothpaste, tooth brushes, comb and brush, lip balm; plastic garbage bags (heavy-duty) and ties; medium sized plastic bucket with tight lid; disinfectant; small shovel for digging a latrine.
- Entertainment, such as games and books.
- Remember to consider the needs of very young and older family members, such as infants and elderly or disabled persons include medications, denture needs, contact lenses and supplies, extra eye glasses, and hearing aid batteries.



Preparing Your Home for Wildfires

Understanding Defensible Space:

The space immediately surrounding your home that has been modified to slow the rate and intensity of an advancing wildfire is called “defensible space”. **By creating a space around your home that is fire resistant, you can help slow (and may even prevent) the advancing flames from reaching your home.** The illustration below depicts a home with good defensible space.

10 Tips for Creating Defensible Space

- 1. Thin tree and brush cover**
- 2. Dispose of slash and debris left from thinning.**
- 3. Remove dead limbs, leaves and other litter**
- 4. Stack firewood away from home.**
- 5. Maintain irrigated greenbelt.**
- 6. Mow dry grass and weeds.**
- 7. Prune branches to 10 feet above the ground.**
- 8. Trim branches.**
- 9. Clean roof and gutters.**

Houses and Buildings

- When Building or planting, consult with your local planning and zoning department, fire department, or local building officials.** There may be restrictions on the types of materials or plants used in residential areas. Following local codes or recommendations will help reduce injury and damage to you and your property.

- ❑ **Design and landscape your home with wildfire safety in mind.** Obtain local building codes and ordinances for structures built near wooded areas. There may be restrictions on the types of materials or plants used in residential areas.
- ❑ **Select 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, and trim with fire-retardant chemicals that have been listed by the Underwriter's Laboratory (UL). Avoid using wooden shakes and shingles for a roof. Use only thick, tempered safety glass in large windows. Sliding glass doors are already required to be made of tempered safety glass.
- ❑ **Install electrical lines underground, if possible.** There is a greater chance of fire from overhead lines that fall or are damaged, such as in an earthquake or storm.
- ❑ **Create a safety zone to separate your home from combustible plants and vegetation.** (Consult your local fire department for recommendations about the safety zone for your property.) Maintain the greatest distance possible between your home and materials that may burn in wildfire. Within this area, you can take steps to reduce potential exposure to flames and radiant heat. Stonewalls can act as heat shields and deflect flames. Swimming pools and patios can be safety zone.
- ❑ **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 forestry office for additional information.
- ❑ **Equip chimneys and stovepipes with a spark arrester that meets the requirements of National Fire Protection Association Code 211.** This will reduce the chance of burning cinders escaping through the chimney, starting outdoor fires.
- ❑ **Consider installing protective shutters or heavy fire-resistant drapes.** The heat from a fire creates wind, which can blow hot cinders, sometimes large enough and with enough force to break windows.
- ❑ **Keep a ladder handy that will reach the roof.** You may need to get on the roof to wet it down or remove flammable debris.
- ❑ **Keep household items handy that can be used as fire tools: a rake, ax, handsaw or chainsaw, bucket, and shovel.** You may need to fight small fires before emergency responders arrive. Having this equipment will make your efforts more effective.



Access

- ❑ **Plan two ways out of your neighborhood.** Your primary route may be blocked; know an alternate route just in case.
- ❑ **Clearly mark all driveway entrances and display your name and address.** Street names and addresses should be printed in letters and numbers at least 4 inches tall. Signs should be made of fire resistant materials. If your house is set back from the road, your address should be posted at the entrance to your driveway.
- ❑ **Make sure that fire vehicles can get to your home.** Clear away weak branches or branches that are too close to the roadway. Make sure that driveways are wide enough for fire trucks. Single lane roads or driveways should have turnouts to allow fire trucks to exit. Roads and bridges leading to your home should be strong enough to carry 40,000 lbs.

Plants and Vegetation

- ❑ **Plant fire-resistant shrubs and trees in your safety zone and on the remainder of your property.** Fire-resistant plants are less likely to catch and spread fire closer to your home. For example, hardwood trees are more fire-resistant than pine, evergreen, eucalyptus, or fir trees.
- ❑ **Rake away leaves, dead limbs, and twigs. Remove leaves and rubbish from under structures and dispose of them properly. Clear all flammable vegetation.** This will help reduce the fuel loads.
- ❑ **Have a professional tree service thin a 15-foot space between tree crowns, and remove limbs within 6 to 10 feet of the ground.** This will help reduce the chance of fire spreading from tree to tree or from ground to tree.
- ❑ **Remove dead branches from all trees.** Dead branches are easily combustible.
- ❑ **Keep all tree and shrub limbs trimmed so they don't come in contact with electrical wires.** Electrical wires can be easily damaged or knocked loose by swaying branches.
- ❑ **Keep trees adjacent to buildings free of dead or dying wood and moss.** Taller plants are more likely to spread fire.
- ❑ **Prune tree branches and shrubs within 15 feet of a stovepipe or chimney outlet.**

Reducing Fire Hazards

The best way that you can protect your home from fires is to prevent the fires from starting. Here are some ways that you can reduce fire hazards in your community.

- ❑ **Ask the Power Company to clear branches from power lines.** High-voltage power lines can be very dangerous. Only authorized and trained professionals should work around them.
- ❑ **Remove vines from the walls of the home.** Even live vines can spread fire quickly.
- ❑ **Mow and water grass regularly.** This will help reduce the fire load.
- ❑ **Place propane tanks at least 30 feet from the home or other structures.** Propane tanks can explode under certain conditions. Make sure a pressure-relief valve is installed on the propane tank.
- ❑ **Clear a 10-foot area around propane tanks and the barbecue. Place a metal screen over the grill—use nonflammable material with mesh no coarser than one-quarter inch.** This will help reduce the chance and lessen the effects of fire.
- ❑ **Regularly dispose of newspapers and rubbish at an approved site.** Follow local burning regulations. Regular disposal of flammable items will reduce the fuel available for fire.
- ❑ **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.** Fires can start quickly from hidden cinders or burnt materials that are still hot. Once they are burned, chunks of flammable items can ignite at lower temperatures. Bury ashes to avoid potential fires.
- ❑ **Stack firewood at least 30 feet away uphill from your home. Clear combustible material within 20 feet of stack. Use only UL-listed wood burning devices.** Fire tends to travel uphill, keeping highly combustible firewood and other materials above your home will reduce the effects of fire on your home.
- ❑ **Regularly clean roof and gutters.** Remove all dead limbs, needles, and debris that spread fire.
- ❑ **Avoid open burning completely, especially during the fire season.** Ash and cinders lighter than air float and may be blown into areas with heavy fuel load, starting wildfires.
- ❑ **Report hazardous conditions that could cause a wildfire.** Community responders may be able to eliminate or reduce conditions that could cause fire.



What to Do When Wildfire Threatens

- Listen regularly to local radio or television stations for updated emergency information. Follow the instructions of local officials.** Wildfire can change direction and speed suddenly. A minor threat can quickly escalate to a major threat. Local officials will be able to advise you of the safest escape route, which may be different from what you expect.
- Back your car into the garage or park it in an open space facing the direction of escape. Shut doors and roll up windows. Leave the key in the ignition. Close garage windows and doors, but leave them unlocked. Disconnect automatic garage door openers because power may go out.** These steps will make it easier to leave quickly should wildfire threaten. Load your car with your disaster supplies kit and any other necessary evacuation items.
- Confine pets to one room. Make plans to care for your pets in case you must evacuate.** Pets may try to run if they feel threatened by fire. Keeping them inside and in one room will allow you to find them quickly if you need to leave.
- Arrange temporary housing at a friend or relative's home outside the threatened area.** You will be more comfortable in someone's home than in a public shelter. Plus, shelters do not allow pets.

Inside Your Home

- Shut off gas at the meter.
- Open fireplace damper. Close fireplace screens.
- Close windows, vents, doors, venetian blinds, or noncombustible window coverings, and heavy drapes. Remove flammable drapes and curtains.
- Move flammable furniture into the center of the home away from windows and sliding-glass doors.
- Close all doors and windows inside your home to prevent draft.
- Place valuables that will not be damaged by water in a pool or pond.
- If hoses and adequate water are available, place sprinklers on roofs and on anything that might be damaged by fire.
- Seal attic and ground vents with precut plywood or commercial seals.
- Remove combustible items from around the house, lawn and poolside furniture, umbrellas, tarp coverings, and firewood.
- Set up the portable gasoline-powered pump.
- Wet shrubs within 15 feet of the home.
- Gather fire tools.
- Be ready to evacuate all family members and pets when the fire nears or when instructed to do so by local officials. You may need to leave quickly, without much warning. There may be only minutes before the fire is upon you.
- If you are trapped. You cannot outrun a fire. Cover your 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 your body with wet clothing or soil. Breathe the air close to the ground through a cloth to avoid scorching lungs or inhaling smoke. Wildfires move very fast and create their own wind, helping them to move even faster.

What To Do If Evacuation Is Necessary

- If advised to evacuate, *do so immediately*. You may have only minutes to act. Save yourself.
- Wear protective clothing—sturdy shoes, cotton or woolen clothing, long pants, a long-sleeved shirt, gloves, and a handkerchief to protect your face. Hot embers or cinders can burn your skin if you come into contact with them. Smoke can make it difficult to breathe, damaging breathing passages.

- ❑ **Take your Disaster Supplies Kit.** These items will make you more comfortable while you are away from home.
- ❑ **Lock your home.** There may be others who evacuate after you or return before you. Secure your house as you normally would.
- ❑ **Tell someone outside of the wildfire area where you are going.** Relatives and friends will be concerned about your safety. Letting someone know your travel plans will help relieve their fear and anxiety.
- ❑ **Choose a route away from fire hazards.** Watch for changes in the speed and direction of fire and smoke. Staying as far away as possible will provide you with the greatest safety.

What to Do After a Wildfire

- ❑ **Use caution and exercise good judgement when re-entering a burned wildland area.** Hazards may still exist, including hot spots, which can flare up without warning.
- ❑ **Avoid damaged or fallen power poles or lines, and downed wires. Immediately report electrical damage to authorities.** Electric wires may shock people or cause further fires. If possible, remain on the scene to warn others of the hazard until repair crews arrive.
- ❑ **Be careful around burned trees and power poles.** They may have lost stability due to fire damage.
- ❑ **Watch for ash pits and mark them for safety.** Ash pits are holes full of hot ashes, created by burned trees and stumps. You can be seriously burned by falling into ash pits or landing in them with your hands and feet. Warn your family and neighbors to keep clear of the pits.
- ❑ **When vegetation is burned away, it makes the soil more susceptible to mudslides and flash flooding.** If you hear flashflood sirens, climb to higher ground immediately. For more information on flooding and mudslides, you can call your local American Red Cross or the National Weather Service.
- ❑ **If you have experienced loss due to the fire, there are agencies that can help you. Be sure to call your local American Red Cross.** Not only can they help you, they are also aware of resources in your community.

Internet Information

For more information on how you can protect your family and your property from wildfires and other disasters, you can check out the following websites:

American Red Cross: <http://www.redcross.org>

Bureau of Land Management: <http://www.blm.gov>

Colorado “FireWise”: <http://www.firewise.org/co/>

FEMA: <http://www.fema.gov/reg-viii/fires.htm>

National Interagency Fire Center:

<http://www.nifc.gov>

Smokey Bear: <http://www.smokeybear.com>

Fire Safe Council: <http://www.firesafecouncil.org>

USFS Rocky Mountain Region:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/fire/rmacc.html>

Or for information specific for your county look in the Colorado State County Directory at:

http://www.state.co.us/gov_dir/countygovs.html

More information is also available by calling your local American Red Cross Chapter.