

# WILDFIRES



BEFORE



DURING



AFTER

# BEFORE



The number of people living in woodland settings—near forests, mountains, or rural areas—is on the rise. There, homeowners enjoy the beauty of the environment, yet they face the very real danger of wildfires.

Wildfires, are inescapable forces of nature, and often begin unnoticed. About 90 percent of the time, fires are started by people (often by accident or through negligence). The rest are triggered by lightning or lava, according to the National Park Service.

Homes that survive a major wildfire often do so because the homeowners prepared well ahead of time.

Fires can spread quickly, igniting brush, trees, and buildings. Reduce your risk by preparing now.

Meet with your family to plan what to do and where to go if wildfires threaten your area.

## What to do before fire strikes

- Build an emergency supply kit and make a family communications plan
- Design and landscape your home with wildfire safety in mind; select materials and plants that can help contain fire rather than fuel it
- Plant fire-resistant shrubs and trees, such as hardwood trees, which are less flammable than pine, evergreen, eucalyptus, or fir trees
- Use fire-resistant or noncombustible materials on the roof and exterior structure of the dwelling, or treat wood or combustible material with fire-retardant chemicals evaluated by a nationally recognized laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL)
- Regularly clean roof and gutters
- Inspect chimneys at least twice a year and clean them at least once a year
  - Keep dampers in good working order
  - Equip chimneys and stovepipes with a spark arrester that meets the requirements of the National Fire Protection Association (contact your local fire department for exact specifications)
- Use 1/8-inch mesh screen beneath porches, decks, floor areas, and the home itself, and screen the openings to floors, roof, and attic
- Install a dual-sensor smoke alarm on each level of your home (especially near bedrooms); test monthly and change the batteries at least once a year
- Teach each family member how to use a fire extinguisher (ABC type) and show them where it's kept
- Keep household items handy that can be used as fire tools: a rake, ax, handsaw or chain saw, bucket, and shovel
- Keep a ladder that will reach the roof
- Consider installing protective shutters or heavy fire-resistant drapes
- Clear flammable items from around the house—such as wood piles, lawn furniture, barbecue grills, and tarp coverings — and move them outside of your defensible space
- Identify and maintain an adequate outside water source such as a small pond, cistern, well, swimming pool, or hydrant
- Ensure that your garden hose 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 near other structures on the property; install additional outlets at least 50 feet from the home
- Consider obtaining a portable gas-powered pump in case electrical power is cut off

# DURING



Protecting your loved ones and yourself during a wildfire is essential. If advised to evacuate, do so immediately. Take your disaster supply kit, lock your home, and choose a route away from the fire hazard.

Watch for changes in the speed and direction of the fire and smoke. A wildfire can be highly unpredictable. Tell someone when you left and where you are going.

If you see a wildfire and haven't received evacuation orders yet, call 911. Don't assume that someone else has already called. Describe the location of the fire, speak slowly and clearly, and answer any questions the dispatcher asks.

## If possible, take the following actions when a wildfire is imminent

- Arrange temporary housing at a friend's or relative's home outside the threatened area in case you need to evacuate
- Wear protective clothing when outside, such as sturdy shoes, cotton or woolen clothes, long pants, a long-sleeved shirt, gloves, and a handkerchief to protect your face
- Gather fire tools such as a rake, ax, handsaw or chainsaw, bucket and shovel
- Close windows, doors, pet doors, and vents to reduce drafts and radiant heat in the home
- Remove flammable drapes and curtains. Close all shutters, blinds or heavy non-combustible window coverings to reduce radiant heat
- Open the damper on your fireplace, but close the fireplace screen
- Shut off any natural gas, propane or fuel oil supplies at the source
- Connect garden hoses to outdoor water faucet and fill any pools, hot tubs, garbage cans, tubs or other large containers with water
- Place lawn sprinklers on the roof and near above-ground fuel tanks. Leave sprinklers on and douse these structures with water as long as possible
- Be mindful of water use restrictions for areas affected by wildfires
- If you have gas-powered pumps for water, make sure they are fueled and ready
- Place a ladder against the house in clear view
- Close all garage doors and disconnect any automatic openers so the doors can still be opened by hand if the power goes out
- Place valuable papers, keepsakes, and anything "you can't live without" inside the car in the garage, ready for a quick departure; don't forget about any pets that are still with you
- Place valuables that will not be damaged by water in a pool or pond
- Move flammable furniture into the center of the residence away from the windows and sliding-glass doors
- Turn on outside lights and leave a light on in every room to make the house more visible in heavy smoke
- Follow additional guidance provided by local authorities

# AFTER

Following a wildfire, return home after local fire or law enforcement authorities say it's safe to do so.

Fire can damage a structure's integrity, so have the building inspected to make sure that it's safe before you enter.



## Guidelines following a wildfire

### **Indoor safety**

- Go to a designated public shelter if you have been told to evacuate or if you feel it's unsafe to remain in your home. Text “shelter” + your ZIP code to 43362 (4FEMA) to find the nearest shelter in your area (example: shelter 12345)
- If you have evacuated, do not enter your home until officials say it is safe
- Use caution when entering burned areas as hazards may still exist, including hot spots, which can flare up without warning
- For several hours after the fire, maintain a fire watch; recheck for smoke and sparks throughout the house and if you see smoke or fire, evacuate immediately and call 9-1-1
- If you have a safe or strong box, do not try to open it as it can hold intense heat for several hours; if the door is opened before the box has cooled, contents could burst into flames

### **Outdoor safety**

- If a building inspector has placed a color-coded sign on the home, do not enter until you get further instruction about the sign and whether it's safe to re-enter
- Use caution when entering fire-damaged and burned areas; hazards may still exist, including hot spots that can flare up and trees that can fall without warning
- Watch for ash pits and mark them for safety and warn family and neighbors to keep clear
- Avoid damaged or fallen power lines, poles, and downed wires

- Check the roof immediately after the fire danger has passed; put out any roof fires, sparks, or embers; check the attic for hidden burning sparks

### **Health and personal safety**

- If you or those you're with are burn victims, call 9-1-1 immediately; cool and cover burns to reduce chance of further injury or infection
- Discard any food that has been exposed to heat, smoke, or soot
- Do NOT use water that you think may be contaminated to wash dishes, brush teeth, prepare food, wash hands, make ice, or make baby formula
- Wet down debris to minimize breathing dust particles
- Follow public health guidance on safe cleanup of fire ash and safe use of masks
- Watch animals closely and keep them under direct control; hidden embers and hot spots could burn your pets' paws or hooves

### **Coping with the aftermath**

- Remain calm. Pace yourself. You may find yourself in the position of taking charge of other people. Listen carefully to what people are telling you, and deal patiently with urgent situations first
- Licensed Employee Assistance Program (EAP) counselors are available 24/7 to assist you



# RESOURCES

Learn about the emergency plans that have been established in your area by state and local government.

In any emergency, always listen to the instructions given by local emergency management officials.

## ***Additional resources are available***

Find more information online at **foh4you.com** or call the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for help and support.

Consultants are available any time, day or night to provide confidential assistance at no cost to you.

## Helpful websites and organizations

- American Red Cross  
RedCross.org  
1-800-RED-CROSS (1-800-733-2767)
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (which oversees the U.S. Fire Administration)  
FEMA.gov  
1-800-621-FEMA (1-800-621-3362)  
(TTY: 1-800-462-7585)
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administrations' National Weather Service (NOAA Watch)  
Weather.gov  
1-828-271-4800, then press 2  
(TTY: 1-828-271-4010)  
ncdc.orders@noaa.gov
- National Voluntary Organization Active in Disaster (NVOAD)  
NVOAD.org  
1-703-778-5088

---

# 24

HOURS A DAY

## Employee Assistance Program

1-800-222-0364  
(TTY: 1-888-262-7848)  
foh4you.com

15.3376

Information for this brochure adapted from Ready.gov, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) website for disaster preparedness.