

# Wildfires

## Background

More 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 is the cause of many fires. Lightning is the other leading cause of forest fires.

As residential areas expand into relatively untouched, forested lands, people living in remote or isolated places increased risk of wildfires. Depending on community resources, there may or may not be adequate fire protection.

A major wildfire can leave a large amount of land scorched, structures destroyed and lives permanently changed. Throughout the western states, forest fires blacken thousands of acres and burn millions of board feet of timber each year.

### ***Three Types of Fires***

- *Surface fires* are the most common type of wild fire and burns along the floor of the forest, moving slowly and killing or damaging trees.
- *Ground fires* are 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.

### ***Safety Zones***

To minimize the risk to structures, home and property owners must create and maintain a safety zone to separate the structure from combustible plants and vegetation.

- Stonewalls can act as heat shields and flame deflectors
- Swimming pools and patios can be a safety zone

Remove fire hazards around homes and other structures.

- Keep tree and shrubs trimmed; keeping them away from electrical wires.
- 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 chimneys clean
- Avoid open burning
- Install and maintain smoke detectors on every level of the home.
- Plan how to evacuate (plan several routes) to safety
- Develop an emergency communication plan for family members
- Identify a relative or friend outside the immediate area as a 'family contact' for all family members to check in with
- Keep emergency kit (see American Red Cross recommendations)

***When Evacuation is Necessary***

- Remove combustible items from around the house
- Take down flammable drapes and curtains and close blinds
- Close all doors and windows
- 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.

***Ways To Reduce Risk***

- Install spark arrestor on chimneys
- Clean roof surfaces and gutters regularly
- Use only fire-resistant materials on homes and other structures