

## Tips to Make Your Home Firewise

There are several things you can do to increase the chances your home will survive a wildfire. Many of these cost little or nothing. The more you can do to make your home fire-safe, the better. This list groups actions according to cost to help you get started.

### No Cost (just a little time)

#### Landscaping

- Clean pine needles, leaves and other flammable debris from your roof and gutters.
- Trim tree branches so they are 6 feet to 10 feet from the ground.
- Trim any tree branches that overhang or touch your roof or other trees.
- Clear dense flammable vegetation from within 30 feet around your home.
- Remove flammable plants like saw palmetto, wax myrtle, yaupon holly, red cedar and gallberry within 30 feet of your home.
- Clear pine needles, leaves and other flammable debris from within 30 feet of your home.
- Take out “ladder fuels” like vines that can carry fire from the ground to the trees or from the ground to the home.
- Move woodpiles, compost piles, gas grills and other combustible items away from your house.
- Keep your lawn well-irrigated; keep any mulched areas moist.
- Regularly mow your lawn.

#### Home

- Conduct a Firewise assessment of your home.
- Develop an escape and emergency plan for your family. Post emergency numbers by all phones.
- Make sure your driveway has at least 16 feet clearance (width and height) from vegetation to provide room for fire trucks to maneuver.

#### Community

- Support the use of prescribed burning in your area. Encourage the use of prescribed burning on undeveloped land near your home.

### Low Cost (\$10 to \$50)

#### Landscaping

- Replace flammable plants with less flammable plants.
- Buy a garden hose that is long enough to reach any area of the home and other structures.

#### Home

- Install a fire extinguisher in the kitchen and the garage.
- Install metal screens on all vents to your home with openings smaller than 1/8 inch.
- Install a spark arrestor or heavy wire screen on fireplace or chimney. Openings should be no larger than 1/2 inch.
- Install highly visible metal house numbers on your home and at the street entrance of the driveway.
- Replace vinyl and PVC gutters and downspouts with metal gutters and downspouts.

### Mid to High Cost (\$50 to more than \$500)

#### Landscaping

- Re-design landscaping following Firewise principles.
- Replace flammable materials in walkways with stone, gravel or cement.
- Build a gravel turn-around area near your house to allow fire truck access.
- Next to the home, replace flammable shrubbery mulch, like pine straw or shredded wood chips, with coarse gravel, stone or chunky bark.
- Install a metal or masonry barrier at least 10 feet between your house and any attached wood fence.
- Enclose decks to prevent accumulation of flammable debris.
- Have propane tanks moved at least 10 feet from the house with at least 10 feet of gravel or other non-flammable material around them.

#### Home

- Re-roof with non-flammable roofing materials like metal, Class-A asphalt shingles or terra cotta tiles.
- Treat flammable materials like wood roofs, decks, and siding with fire-retardant chemicals.
- Replace vinyl or PVC siding with plaster, stucco or concrete masonry.
- Install metal soffits, eaves and gutters in place of any that are made of vinyl or PVC.
- Replace all windows and skylights with tempered glass.
- Detach or replace flammable wood structures, such as porches, fences and sheds that are attached to the house, with structures constructed of non-flammable materials.

## Family Emergency Plan

The most important thing to protect is you and your family. Making your home fire-safe will help it survive a wildfire, but you must also be ready to evacuate when one comes close to your home. Use the following guidelines to develop an emergency plan that will keep your family safe when a wildfire threatens.

### Be Prepared

- Clearly label your street name and house number with metal signs and posts and make sure your driveway has at least 16 feet clearance (width and height) from vegetation to provide room for fire trucks to maneuver.
- Your home should have at least two ground-level doors to use as safety exits in case of fire. Make sure each room has two escape exits — These can include doors and windows.
- Prepare an emergency disaster supplies kit, which includes food and water for three days, first aid supplies (including prescriptions), a portable radio, a flashlight, extra batteries, clothing and blankets, credit card, extra set of car keys, cash or traveler's checks.
- Keep important family documents in a waterproof container.
- Have a ladder, shovel, rake and multiple water hoses readily accessible that will reach all parts of the home.
- Develop and maintain a water supply, such as a small pond, well, swimming pool or hydrant.
- Plan how your family will stay in contact if separated — Pick two meeting places and choose an out-of-state friend or family member for everyone to call.
- Post emergency telephone numbers by every phone.
- Purchase and use a NOAA weather alert radio.

## When a Wildfire Threatens

- Contact the fire department or district fire warden immediately.
- Back your car into the garage or park it facing the direction of escape. Leave the key in the ignition.
- Locate family members and pets. Confine pets to one room.
- Don non-flammable cotton or wool clothing.
- Arrange temporary housing outside the threatened area.
- Close all windows, doors, heavy drapes, blinds, shutters, and other openings to the outside to prevent sparks from blowing inside.
- Remove lightweight curtains.
- Move flammable items away from windows and doors.
- Turn off fuel supplies and their sources.
- If you have time, wet down the roof and the area adjacent to the house.

### If Advised to Evacuate

- Do so immediately.
- Take your disaster supplies kit.
- Lock your home.
- Tell someone where you are going.
- Choose a route away from fire hazards.

# emergency plan

## Web Sites for More Information

The following Web sites offer more information about prescribed fire, fire safety and Firewise structures.

### **firewise.org**

This is the official Firewise site. It includes checklists, resources for homeowners and the latest information on fire-safe living.

### **flame.fl-dof.com**

This is the Florida Division of Forestry's fire Web page. It contains information about wildfire and prescribed fire in Florida.

### **edis.ifas.ufl.edu**

Visit the Florida Cooperative Extension's Electronic Data Information Source for online publications on a variety of topics including home and fire safety.

### **www.dnr.state.mn.us/firewise**

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has put together several useful guides for homeowners, including "50 things you can do to protect your home" and "25 tips to make your home Firewise."

### **www.flash.org**

The Federal Alliance for Safe Homes Inc. (FLASH) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting disaster safety and property loss mitigation. Its Web site includes a home safety quiz and other useful information.

### **nature.org/fire**

The Nature Conservancy's Web site provides information about fire's role in the environment and the Conservancy's efforts to improve ecosystems through the use of prescribed burning.

### **floridadisaster.org**

Florida Division of Emergency Management's Web site provides disaster information, contacts and information on emergency preparedness.

### **redcross.org**

The American Red Cross's Web site provides safety and disaster relief information.

### **ibhs.org**

Institute for Business and Home Safety is another resource for information on how to make your home safer from wildfire.

### **firelab.org**

The Fire Sciences Lab of the U.S. Forest Service provides information on current research being conducted on the likelihood of homes burning in various fire conditions.

### **www.nifc.gov**

The National Interagency Fire Center is a government organization that provides news about wildfire throughout the country.

web sites

## Fire Behavior and Home Safety

Historically, lightning-ignited fires swept across much of Florida, and many plants and animals now depend on periodic fires for their reproduction, growth and survival. Today, increased development of natural areas combined with fire suppression programs has stopped fire from moving across the land as it once did. This absence of natural fire has allowed plant materials and vegetation to accumulate, making fires more catastrophic. At the same time, more and more people are moving close to and within forested areas, putting their homes at risk for wildfire.

There are several things homeowners can do to keep their homes safe in the event of wildfires. By understanding how fires spread and behave, homeowners can make changes to their yards and houses to improve their chances of surviving a wildfire.

## Fuels

The rich and varied vegetation of Florida along with wet and dry seasons create a flammable environment. Florida's ideal growing conditions produce large volumes of plant material each year. As this material accumulates it becomes fuel for wildfires. Dead branches and needles burn quickly, as do some highly flammable trees and shrubs.

A fire can spread from the woods to your home by consuming fuels like these in your yard. To prevent this from happening, create and maintain at least 30 feet of open space around your home. Remove anything in your yard that can burn easily — dead leaves, pine needles and other dead vegetation.

Design your landscape using islands or patches of plantings rather than continuous plant beds. Don't plant highly flammable plants like saw palmetto, wax myrtle or gallberry that contain resin and oils that burn easily. Make sure trees are evenly spaced and regularly pruned so that the lowest limb is between 6 feet and 10 feet from the ground. Keep trees clear of vines, shrubs and other "ladder fuels" that a fire can consume to climb into the tree top. Keep branches off and away from the roof and the rest of the home and from other trees.

## Burning Embers and Firebrands

As a fire grows and spreads, wind can carry burning embers and firebrands more than a mile beyond the fire's edge. These embers and firebrands can cause additional spot fires in the woods, and can land on roofs and ignite a house.

A roof fire can quickly spread through the rest of the home; therefore, it is important to construct your roof with fire-resistant materials such as metal, Class-A asphalt shingles or terra cotta tiles. All vents and open eaves should be screened.

Keep anything that can catch and spread fire — tree branches, vines, leaves and other debris — cleared from the roof, soffits, eaves and gutters.

## Prescribed Fire

Land managers use prescribed fire to replicate the effects of fire in natural areas. Prescribed burning is the controlled application of fire to the land by trained and certified fire staff. These professionals understand fire behavior and how to predict it to ensure the safety of the burn crew, nearby residents and private property.

Fire managers follow strict safety procedures. They obtain a permit from the Florida Division of forestry and notify pertinent emergency services that they will be conducting a prescribed burn.

By reducing fuel loads under suitable conditions, prescribed burns benefit Florida's native plants and wildlife and reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfires to nearby homes and communities.