

Be Firewise

Don't let this past cold, wet winter and spring give you a false sense of security about wildfire. Numerous grass and brush fires have already sprung up across western Washington, and the conditions are only going to get worse over the next couple of months. The good news is that there are simple ways to help prepare and protect your property in the event of a wildfire.

If you live in or adjacent to a wooded area, especially at the top of a slope, you should take special precautions to reduce your wildfire risk. Always be careful with fire and obey burn bans.

Below are tips for preparing your home and landscape to be more survivable in a wildfire.

Fire-service Access

- ✓ Make sure your address marker is easily viewed from the road at night.
- ✓ Make sure firefighters can get their equipment down your driveway. Driveways and gates should be at least 12 feet wide with a 15-foot vertical clearance, a less than 5% slope.
- ✓ Make sure there are adequate turnaround areas for firetrucks. If fire fighters think they might get themselves and their equipment trapped because of a difficult turnaround, they won't risk venturing down your driveway.

Your Home & Structures (Built Fuel)

- ✓ The roof is the most vulnerable part of your home in a wildfire. It should be Class A fire-rated roofing. Ask a professional for guidance on this.
- ✓ Choose metal or vinyl gutters.
- ✓ Keep the roof and roof gutters free of flammable leaves, needles and debris
- ✓ Cover or enclose attic, eave, soffit and crawl space openings covered with 1/8-1/4 inch metal screening to prevent embers from blowing in.
- ✓ Install double paned windows that can withstand more heat.
- ✓ Choose metal screening for windows versus vinyl.
- ✓ Remove highly flammable deck furniture and floor mats from decks when leaving for multiples days during fire season.
- ✓ Enclose the area under decks with 1/8-1/4 inch metal screening or other fire-resistant material to prevent embers from blowing in.
- ✓ If wooden fences are connected to the house, put metal flashing between the connections.
- ✓ Store firewood and lumber 40 feet away from the house and other structures.

Your Landscaping – 5 feet from house

- ✓ Remove dead vegetation and debris from around structures and under decks, including raking back accumulated layers of dry pine needles and leaves from against the house.
- ✓ Trim tree limbs so they don't hang over the roof.
- ✓ Keep area adjacent to house clear of highly flammable plants, such as most evergreen trees, junipers, lavender and rosemary.
- ✓ Consider putting a 3 to 5-foot wide swath of gravel directly around the base of the home and other structures.

Your Landscaping – up to 30 feet from house

- ✓ Keep grass short around all structures, wood piles and propane tanks.
- ✓ Maintain vegetation in a healthy condition. If possible, irrigate this area of your landscape.

- ✓ Maintain an emergency water source. If you have an irrigation system, make sure it is operable even if you've turned it off in to conserve water; it may come in handy in case of fire.
- ✓ Have tools (e.g., shovel, rake, axe, handsaw or chainsaw) and water hoses readily available. These may be useful tools for fire fighters during a wildfire.

Your Landscaping – over 30 feet from house

- ✓ Ground fires can become dangerous tree crown fires if the lower limbs of large trees and understory vegetation that create a ladder for the fire are not removed. Lowest limbs should be 6 to 10 feet from the ground or understory plants.
- ✓ Incorporate fuel breaks into your landscape such as a gravel driveway or path, healthy lawn, water features, and patio walkways.

Lastly, prepare for wildfire by developing, discussing and practicing a disaster plan with everyone in your home. Your disaster plan should include the following:

- Details for care of pets and livestock.
- Identification of at least two ways out of your neighborhood.
- A designated meeting place.