

# *Your Personal* **Wildland Fire ACTION GUIDE**



*Ready*



*Set*



*Go!*



2nd Edition

# Ready, Set, Go!

Saving Lives and Property  
through Advance Planning



**F**ire season is a year-round reality in our region, requiring firefighters and residents to be on heightened alert for the threat of wildfire throughout the year.

With our many canyons, San Diego has hundreds of linear miles of Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). Each year, wildland fires consume hundreds of homes in the WUI. Studies show that as many as 80 percent of those homes could have been saved if their owners had only followed a few simple fire-safe practices. In addition,

wildland fire related deaths occur because people wait too long to leave their home.

The San Diego Fire-Rescue Department takes every precaution to help protect you and your property from wildland fire. However, the reality is that in a major wildland fire event, there will simply not be enough fire resources or firefighters to defend every home.

Successfully preparing for a wildland fire requires you to take personal responsibility for protecting yourself, your family and your property. In this Action Guide, we hope to provide the tips and tools you need to prepare; to know what to do when a fire starts; and to leave early.

The Ready, Set, Go! Program works in complementary and collaborative fashion with Firewise USA® and other wildland fire public education efforts.

Fire has always been, a natural occurrence in Southern California. Our hills and canyons burned periodically long before we built homes here. Wildland fire, fueled by a build-up of dry vegetation and driven by seasonal Santa Ana winds, are extremely dangerous and difficult to control. Many homes have been built and landscaped without fully understanding what a fire can do and few families are adequately prepared for a quick evacuation.



It's not a question of **if** but **when** the next major wildland fire will occur. Advance planning and preparation are our best defense. We hope you find the tips in the following pages helpful and take them to heart.

Colin Stowell, Fire Chief  
San Diego Fire-Rescue Department

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# Living in the Wildland Urban Interface and the Ember Zone

Ready, Set, Go! begins with a house that firefighters can defend.

## Defensible Space Works!

If you live next to a naturally vegetated area, the Wildland Urban Interface, you should provide firefighters with the defensible space they need to protect your home. Create a buffer zone by removing weeds, brush, and other vegetation. This helps keep the fire away from your home and reduces the risk from flying embers.



A home within one mile of a natural area is in the Ember Zone, where wind-driven embers can be a risk to your property. You and your home must be prepared well before a fire occurs. Ember fires can destroy homes or neighborhoods far from the actual front of the wildfire.

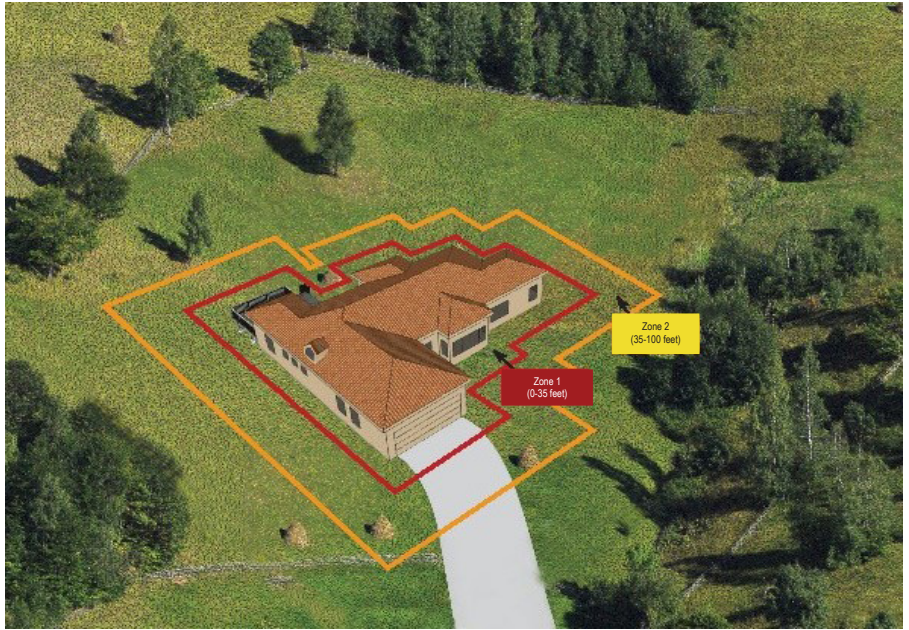


# Create Defensible Space

**D**efensible space is the space between a structure and the wildland area that, under normal conditions, creates a sufficient buffer to slow or halt the spread of fire to a structure.

It protects the home from igniting due to direct flame or radiant heat. Defensible space is essential to help protect a structure during a wildland fire.

Defensible space is made up of two zones around your home; Zone 1: 0-35ft and Zone 2: 35-100ft.



Follow the advice under each zone to help protect your home.

## Zone 1

This zone, which consists of an area of 0 to 35 feet around the structure, features the most intense modification and treatment. This distance is measured from the outside edge of the home's eaves and any attached structures, such as decks.

Do not plant directly beneath windows or next to foundation vents. Frequently prune and maintain plants in this zone to ensure vigorous growth and a low growth habit. Remove dead branches, stems, and leaves. Do not store firewood or other combustible materials in this area. Enclose or screen decks with metal screening. Extend gravel coverage under the decks. Do not use areas under decks for storage.

Prune trees with low-lying branches (ladder fuels that would allow a surface fire to climb into the tree) and any branches that interfere with the roof or are within 10 feet of the chimney.

## Zone 2

This zone features fuel reduction efforts and serves as a transitional area between Zones 1 and 2. The size of Zone 2 depends on the slope of the ground where the structure is built. Typically, the defensible space should extend 100 feet from the structure.

Remove stressed, diseased, dead, or dying trees and shrubs. Thin and prune the remaining larger trees and shrubs. Be sure to extend thinning along either side of your driveway all the way to your main access road. In all other areas, prune all branches of shrubs or trees up to a height of 10 feet above ground (or 1/3 the height, whichever is the least).

These actions help eliminate the continuous fuel surrounding a structure while enhancing home site safety and the aesthetics of the property. Keep grass and wildflowers under 2 inches in height. Regularly remove leaf and needle debris from the yard.

# Making Your Home Fire Resistant

## Harden Your Home

Construction materials and the quality of the defensible space surrounding the structure are what increases the chance of survival in a wildland fire. Embers from a wildland fire will find the weak spot in your home's fire protection scheme and can easily catch because of a small, overlooked or seemingly inconsequential factor. Below are some measures you can take to safeguard your home.



### ROOFS

Roofs are the most vulnerable surface where embers land because they can become lodged and can start a fire. Roof valleys, open ends of barrel tiles and rain gutters are all points of entry. **Block off all open spaces, and regularly inspect these areas.**

### EAVES

Embers can gather under open eaves and ignite combustible material. **Enclose your eaves to prevent ember intrusion, and regularly clear away debris that collect here.**

### VENTS

Embers can enter the attic or other concealed spaces and ignite combustible materials. Vents in eaves and cornices are particularly vulnerable, as are any unscreened vents. **Use corrosion resistant metal mesh to screen all vents, and check them regularly to remove any debris that collects in front of the screen.**

### WALLS and FENCING

Combustible siding or other combustible/overlapping materials provide surfaces or crevices for embers to nestle and ignite. **Build or remodel with noncombustible or ignition-resistant materials whenever possible. Regularly clear away debris from any crevices and perform annual upkeep.**

### WINDOWS and DOORS

Embers can enter gaps in doors, including garage doors. **Install weather proofing around your garage door, and if your garage is attached to your home make sure the interior door is solid and on self-closing hinges.**

Plants or combustible storage near windows can be ignited from embers and generate heat that can break windows and/or melt combustible frames. **Wherever possible, use dual-paned windows with tempered glass, as they are less likely to shatter from radiant heat.**

### BALCONIES and DECKS

**Construct your balconies or decks with noncombustible materials, and do not store combustible items underneath them. If there is a fire threat, bring any furniture into your home.** Embers can collect in or on combustible surfaces, or beneath decks and balconies, igniting the material and entering the home through walls or windows.

**To harden your home even further, consider protecting your homes with a residential fire sprinkler system.** In addition to extinguishing a fire started by an ember that enters your home, it also can help protect you and your family year-round from any home fire.

# Tour a Wildland Fire Prepared Home

**Home Site and Yard:** Ensure all vegetation within 100 feet around your home or to your property line is well-managed. This area may need to be enlarged in severe fire hazard areas. This may mean considering the impact a common slope or neighbor's yard may have on your property during a wildland fire.

Cut dry weeds and grass before noon when temperatures are cooler to reduce the chance of sparking a fire.

Landscape with fire-resistant plants that have a high moisture content and are low-growing.

Keep woodpiles, propane tanks and combustible materials away from your home and other structures such as detached garages, barns and sheds.

Ensure that trees are far away from power lines.

**Inside:** Keep working fire extinguishers on hand. Install smoke alarms on each level of your home and near bedrooms. Test them monthly and change the batteries twice a year.

**Address:** Make sure your address is clearly visible from the road and constructed with noncombustible materials. Reflective numbering is recommended.

**Roof:** Your roof is the most vulnerable part of your home because it can easily catch fire from wind-blown embers. Homes with wood-shake or shingle roofs are at high risk of being destroyed during a wildfire.

Build your roof or re-roof with Class A fire-resistant materials such as composition, metal or tile. Block any spaces between roof decking and covering to prevent ember intrusion.

Clear pine needles, leaves and other debris from your roof and gutters.

Cut any tree branches within 10 feet of your roof.

**Vents:** All vent openings should be covered with 1/8-inch or smaller corrosion resistant metal mesh. Do not use fiberglass or plastic mesh because they can melt and burn.

Attic vents in eaves or cornices should be baffled or otherwise protected to prevent ember intrusion (mesh is not enough).

**Windows:** Radiant heat from burning vegetation or a nearby structure can cause the glass in windows to break. This will allow burning embers to enter and start internal fires. Single-paned and large windows are particularly vulnerable.

Install dual-paned windows with a minimum of one pane being tempered glass to reduce the chance of breakage during a fire.

Limit the size and number of windows in your home that face large areas of vegetation.

**Walls:** Wood products, such as boards, panels or shingles, and common siding materials are combustible and not good choices for fire-prone areas. Build or remodel with ignition-resistant or noncombustible building materials, such as brick, cement, masonry or stucco. Be sure to extend materials from foundation to roof.

**Garage:** Have a fire extinguisher and tools such as a shovel, rake, bucket and hoe available for fire emergencies.

Install a solid door with self-closing hinges between living areas and the garage. Install weather stripping around and under door to prevent ember intrusion.

Store all combustibles and flammable liquids away from ignition sources.

**Driveways and Access Roads:** Driveways should be designed to allow fire and emergency vehicles and equipment to reach your house.

Access roads should have a minimum 10-foot clearance on either side of the traveled section of the roadway and should allow for two-way traffic.

Ensure that all gates open inward and are wide enough to accommodate emergency equipment.

Trim trees and shrubs overhanging the road to a minimum of 14 feet to allow emergency vehicles to pass.

**Fencing:** Make sure to use non-combustible fencing to protect your home during a wildfire. Area at the base of the fence should be kept clear of debris.

**Eaves:** Box in eaves with non-combustible materials to prevent accumulation of embers.

**Gutters:** Screen or enclose rain gutters with a flat noncombustible device. If possible, the device should follow the slope of the roof. Remove debris from gutters at least twice a year, or more if necessary.

**Water:** Have multiple garden hoses that are long enough to reach any area of your home and other structures on your property. If you have a pool or well, consider a pump.

**Deck/Patio Cover:** Use heavy timber or noncombustible construction material for decks.

Enclose the underside of balconies and decks with fire-resistant materials to prevent embers from blowing underneath.

Keep your deck clear of combustible items, such as baskets, dried flower arrangements and other debris. Combustible materials should not be stored under your deck.

**Chimney:** Cover chimney and stovepipe outlets with a noncombustible screen of 1/4-inch wire mesh to reduce the size of embers leaving the chimney.

Make sure that tree branches are at least 10 feet away from your home.



# Ready, Set, Go!

Now that you've done everything you can to protect your house, it's time to prepare your family. Your Wildfire Action Plan must be prepared with all members of your household well in advance of a fire.

Use these checklists to help you prepare your Wildfire Action Plan. Each family's plan will be different, depending on their situation. Rehearse your plan with your entire family regularly.



## GET READY | Prepare Your Family

- Create a Family Disaster Plan that includes meeting locations and communication plans and rehearse it regularly. Include the evacuation of large animals, such as horses in your plan.
- Have fire extinguishers on hand and teach your family how to use them.
- Ensure that your family knows where your gas, electric, and water main shut-off controls are and how to use them.
- Plan and practice several different evacuation routes.
- Designate an emergency meeting location outside the fire hazard area.
- Assemble an emergency supply kit as recommended by the American Red Cross. Keep an extra kit in your vehicle.
- Appoint an out-of-area friend or relative as a point of contact so you can communicate with family members.
- Maintain a list of emergency contact numbers in your emergency supply kit.
- Have a portable radio or scanner so you can stay updated on the fire and weather emergency announcements.





# GET SET | As the Fire Approaches

- Evacuate as soon as you are set!
- Alert family and neighbors.
- Dress in appropriate clothing (i.e., clothing made from natural fibers, such as cotton, and work boots). Have goggles and a dry bandana or particle mask handy.
- Ensure that you have your emergency supply kit on hand that includes all necessary items, such as a battery powered radio, spare batteries, emergency contact numbers, and ample drinking water.
- Stay tuned to your TV or local radio stations for updates, or check the fire department Web site.
- Remain close to your house, drink plenty of water and keep an eye on your family and pets until you are ready to leave.

## INSIDE CHECKLIST

- Shut all windows and doors, leaving them unlocked.
- Remove flammable window shades and curtains and close metal shutters.
- Remove lightweight curtains.
- Move flammable furniture to the center of the room, away from windows and doors.
- Shut off gas at the meter. Turn off pilot lights.
- Leave your lights on so firefighters can see your house under smoky conditions.
- Shut off the air conditioning.



## OUTSIDE CHECKLIST

- Gather up combustible items from the exterior of the house and bring them inside (e.g., patio furniture, children's toys, door mats, etc.) or place them in your pool.
- Turn off propane tanks.
- Don't leave sprinklers on or water running - they can waste critical water pressure.
- Leave exterior lights on.
- Back your car into the driveway. Shut doors and roll up windows.
- Have a ladder available.
- Patrol your property and extinguish all small fires until you leave.
- Seal attic and ground vents with pre-cut plywood or commercial seals if time permits.

## IF YOU ARE TRAPPED: SURVIVAL TIPS

- Shelter away from outside walls.
- Bring garden hoses inside house so embers don't destroy them.
- Patrol inside your home for spot fires and extinguish them.
- Wear long sleeves and long pants made of natural fibers such as cotton.
- Stay hydrated.
- Ensure you can exit the home if it catches fire (remember if it's hot inside the house, it is four to five times hotter outside).
- Fill sinks and tubs for an emergency water supply.
- Place wet towels under doors to keep smoke and embers out.
- After the fire has passed, check your roof and extinguish any fires, sparks or embers.
- Check inside the attic for hidden embers.
- Patrol your property and extinguish small fires.
- If there are fires that you can not extinguish with a small amount of water or in a short period of time, call 9-1-1.

## GO! | Leave Early

By leaving early, you give your family the best chance of surviving a wildland fire. You also help firefighters by keeping roads clear of congestion, enabling them to move more freely and do their job in a safer environment.

### WHEN TO LEAVE

**Do not wait to be advised to leave** if there is a possible threat to your home or evacuation route. Leave early enough to avoid being caught in fire, smoke, or road congestion. If you are advised to leave by local authorities, do not hesitate!

### WHERE TO GO

**Leave to a predetermined location** (it should be a low-risk area, such as a well-prepared neighbor or relative's house, a Red Cross shelter or evacuation center, motel, etc.)

### HOW TO GET THERE

**Have several travel routes** in case one route is blocked by the fire or by emergency vehicles. Choose the safest route away from the fire.

### WHAT TO TAKE

**Take your emergency supply kit** containing your family and pet's necessary items.



## EMERGENCY SUPPLIES LIST

The American Red Cross recommends every family have an emergency supply kit assembled long before a wildland fire or other emergency occurs. Use the checklist below to help assemble yours. For more information on emergency supplies visit [www.redcross.org/get-help](http://www.redcross.org/get-help).

- Three-day supply of water (one gallon per person per day).
- Non-perishable food for all family members and pets (3 day supply).
- First aid kit.
- Flashlight, battery-powered radio, and extra batteries.
- An extra set of car keys, credit cards, cash or traveler's checks.
- Sanitation supplies.
- Extra eyeglasses or contact lenses.
- Important family documents and contact numbers including insurance documents.
- Map marked with evacuation routes.
- Prescriptions or special medications.
- Family photos, valuable and other irreplaceable items that are easy to carry.
- Personal electronic devices and chargers.

**Note:** Keep a pair of old shoes and a flashlight handy in case of a sudden evacuation at night.

# My Personal Wildland Fire ACTION PLAN

Write up your Wildland Fire Action Plan and post it in a location where every member of your family can see it. Rehearse it with your family.

During high-fire-danger days in your area, monitor your local media for information and be ready to implement your plan.

Hot, dry, and windy conditions create the perfect environment for a wildland fire.

## IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

Out-of-Area Contact \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Work \_\_\_\_\_

School \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

## EVACUATION ROUTES

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_

## WHERE TO GO

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## LOCATION OF EMERGENCY SUPPLY KIT(S)

\_\_\_\_\_

## NOTES

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Contact your local fire department for more tips to prepare before a wildland fire.



# My Personal Wildland Fire ACTION PLAN

## Residential Safety Checklist

Tips To Improve Family and Property Survival During A Wildland Fire

### Ready

#### Get ready

- Dispose of or relocate combustible material from around your home.
- Trim trees & bushes allowing ample space between your home & landscape vegetation.

### Set

#### Be prepared

- Arrange your 'Go-Kit' with prescription medication, emergency supplies, important documents, and other essential items.
- Create your own action plan; involve your family & practice exit plans from the home & neighborhood frequently.
- Be sure you're familiar with local emergency notification systems & evacuation systems.

### Go!

#### Act early

- Get your 'Go-Kit' and leave well before the threat approaches following a planned accessible route.
- Stay aware of the situation and follow your plan.
- Cooperate with local authorities during evacuation & re-entry processes.

Ready, Set, Go!

[www.wildlandfireRSG.org](http://www.wildlandfireRSG.org)

[www.sandiego.gov/fire](http://www.sandiego.gov/fire)



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