

ISSUED AUGUST 2002 BY:

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COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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Fire Protection in Rural Areas

Arizona's rural areas are undergoing increasingly greater development. More people are building homes in forests, brushlands, and grasslands to take advantage of these natural environments.

Often, these sites are quite remote. However, people moving from urban settings expect traditional fire and emergency services. They do not understand the fire protection limitations that exist in rural areas:

- Most rural fire departments are volunteer. Firefighters are not generally present at the fire stations. In addition, the number of firefighters able to respond may be limited, especially during daytime hours during the workweek.
- Response time may be quite long. Volunteers must reach the fire station from home or work, start the fire vehicles and drive to the fire scene. The fire scene may be quite far from the station.
- Water supplies and firefighting equipment are limited. Often, the only significant water supply is that which the fire trucks carry. Water shuttles or refill locations must be established and coordinated.
- Approaching the fire scene may be difficult. Narrow, steep roads and driveways may limit or even prevent access by emergency equipment. Bridges may have weight limitations that prevent large trucks and tankers from reaching the fire. When wildfire does strike, it can occur with little warning and spread quickly. Fire crews and equipment often are overwhelmed by the task of fighting a rapidly advancing wildfire. There may simply not be enough personnel and equipment to defend every home.

Homeowner Preparations

Homeowners can do a great deal to prepare their property for wildfire. Some of these things are detailed in these fact sheets:

- AZ 1288, *Homeowners' "Inside and Out" Wildfire Checklist*
- AZ 1289, *FIREWISE Plant Materials for 3,000 ft. and Higher Elevations*
- AZ 1290, *Creating Wildfire-Defensible Spaces for Your Home and Property*
- AZ 1291, *Fire-Resistant Landscaping*

The following checklist and guidelines will help you prepare for fire safety, evacuation and home defense. Use it as a guide to enhance homesite safety.

At a Glance

- Take steps now to protect your home from a future wildfire. This can spell the difference between your property's destruction or survival.
- During a wildfire, law enforcement officials may ask you to evacuate with little warning. Take precautions now to prepare for that possibility.
- Even if you are forced to evacuate your home, there are some things you can do to help firefighters defend it.

This is an annual checklist. Don't wait until a fire is approaching to perform these tasks.



Figure 1:

1. Thin tree and brush cover.
2. Dispose of slash and debris left from thinning.
3. Remove dead limbs, leaves and other litter.
4. Stack firewood away from home.
5. Maintain irrigated greenbelt.
6. Mow dry grasses and weeds.
7. Prune branches to 10 feet above the ground.
8. Trim branches.
9. Clean roof and gutters.
10. Reduce density of surrounding forest.

Annual Fire Safety Checklist

- Thin trees and brush properly within the defensible space.
- Remove trash and debris from the defensible space.
- Remove any trees growing through the porch.
- Clear roof and gutters of leaves and debris.
- Remove branches overhanging chimney and roof.
- Stack firewood uphill or on a contour away from the home.
- Use noncombustible roof materials.
- Place shutters, fire curtains or heavy drapes on windows.
- Place screens on foundation and eave vents.
- Enclose sides of stilt foundations and decks.
- Use a chimney screen or spark arrester.
- Clear vegetation around fire hydrants, cisterns, propane tanks, etc.
- Make sure an outdoor water supply is available, with hose, nozzle and pump.
- Make sure fire fighting tools, ladder and fire extinguishers are available.
- Post address signs that are clearly visible from the street or road.
- Make sure the driveway is wide enough for fire trucks and equipment.
- Post load limits on bridges.
- Install and test smoke detectors.
- Practice a family fire drill and evacuation plan.

Evacuation Tips

- If a wildfire is threatening your area, listen to your radio for updated reports and evacuation information.
- Confine pets to one room and make plans to take care of them in the event of evacuation.
- Arrange for temporary housing with a friend or relative whose home is outside the threatened area. Leave a note in a prominent place in your home that says where and how you can be contacted.
- If your home is threatened by wildfire, you will be contacted and advised by law enforcement officers to evacuate. If you are not contacted, or you decide to stay and help defend your home, evacuate pets and any family members not needed to protect your home.
- Remove important documents, mementos, etc. from the possible fire area.
- When evacuating, wear protective clothing: sturdy shoes, cotton or woolen clothing, long pants, a long-sleeved shirt, gloves, and a handkerchief to protect your face.
- Choose a route away from the fire if possible. Watch for changes in the speed and direction of the fire and smoke.
- Take a disaster supply kit containing:
 - a supply of drinking water;
 - one change of clothing and footwear for each member of the family;
 - a blanket or sleeping bag for each person;
 - a first aid kit that also includes any prescription medications;
 - emergency tools including a battery-powered radio, flashlight and extra batteries;
 - an extra set of car keys and credit cards, cash or traveler's checks; and
 - extra pairs of eyeglasses and other special items for infant, elderly or disabled family members.

Defending Your Home

Do not jeopardize your life, no material item is worth losing a life over. Whether you choose to stay to defend your home or to evacuate, complete as many of the following preparations as possible.

- Wear fire-resistant clothing and protective gear.
- Remove combustible materials from around structures.
- Close or cover outside vents and shutters.
- Position garden hoses so they reach the entire house. Have the hoses charged, with an adjustable nozzle, but turned off.
- Place large, full water containers around the house. Soak burlap sacks, small rugs or large rags in the containers.
- Place a ladder against the roof of the house on the opposite side of the approaching wildfire. Place a Garden hose near the ladder, prepared as described previously.
- Place portable pumps near available water supplies, such as pools, hot tubs, creeks, etc.
- Close all windows and doors. Do not lock them.
- Close all inside doors.
- Turn on a light in each room, and all outside lights.
- Leave them on even during daylight hours.
- Fill tubs, sinks and any other containers with water.
- Shut off the gas at the outside meter of the propane tank.
- Remove lace, nylon or any other drapes and curtains made from light material. Close Venetian blinds, heavy drapes or fire-resistant window coverings.
- Move overstuffed furniture into the center of the house, away from windows and sliding glass doors.
- Park your car in the garage, facing out. Close the windows but do not lock the doors. Leave the keys in the ignition.
- Close the garage door but leave it unlocked.
- Disconnect the automatic garage door opener.

This fact sheet is based directly on a publication titled "Forest Home Fire Safety" written by F.C. Dennis and produced by the Colorado State Forest Service. FIREWISE is a multi-agency program that encourages the development of defensible space and the prevention of catastrophic wildfire.

Arizona FIREWISE Communities Cooperators

University of Arizona, Northern Arizona University, Arizona State Land Department, Arizona Fire Chiefs Association, Arizona Fire Districts Association, Arizona Emergency Services Association, Arizona Planning Association, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona, National Park Service, USDA Forest Service, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, James A. Christenson, Director, Cooperative Extension, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, The University of Arizona.

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