

ARE YOU READY?



How to get ready for wildfires

Smokey Bear is right: You can help prevent wildfires. But once you've safely packed up your campsite and headed home, you could still be in a wildfire danger zone. So, start today to protect your home and prepare yourself and your loved ones for a wildfire emergency.



What's a wildfire?

A wildfire is an uncontrolled and unplanned fire in a wilderness area that can spread extremely fast, quickly consuming vegetation, trees and nearby homes. While wildfires can be caused by weather events, such as lightning, most wildfires are caused by people. Many things can add to the severity of a wildfire, including dry, hot weather, heavy plant growth and development in wilderness areas.

Wildfires pose a number of health threats, such as burns and smoke inhalation, which can cause coughing, shortness of breath, headaches, chest pain and dangerous medical complications in people who have respiratory illnesses.



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Home safe home



Photo courtesy iStockphoto—Scott Vickers

Like other disasters, the first step to protecting yourself from wildfires is gathering information. Find out about your community's risk for wildfires and the history of wildfire activity where you live. Learn about your community's wildfire warning systems as well as evacuation routes and nearby shelters.

To begin safeguarding your home, ask yourself a few questions. If firefighters need to assist you, are the roads leading to your home wide enough to accommodate firefighting equipment? Is your home visible from main roads? Are the roads leading to your home

clearly marked? These questions are especially important if you live in a remote wilderness area.

Next, take some steps to protect your property by removing items that can fuel a wildfire's spread. The Federal Emergency Management Agency suggests creating a 30-foot safety zone around your home. Some tips to do this include keeping the amount of vegetation in the zone to a minimum; moving landscaping features away from the side of your house; removing tree limbs within 15 feet of the ground; and storing combustible items, such as propane tanks or firewood, far from your home. If you live on a hill, extend your safety zone on the downhill side, as wildfires move quickly uphill. Also, make sure connected garden hoses are accessible on all sides of your home.

If you live in a high-risk area, consider hiring a professional who can assess your home's risk and make recommendations.



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Make a plan

Create a household emergency plan, make sure everyone is involved in putting it together and have practice drills. Make sure you designate an emergency meeting spot in case you and your loved ones are separated when an emergency happens. Also, designate an out-of-town emergency contact for household members to call, as it may be easier to call long distance than locally during a disaster. Post emergency assistance phone numbers next to all the phones in your home and program them into your cellphone.



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Put together an evacuation kit ahead of time that you can take with you at a moment's notice and make sure it includes a battery-operated radio, flashlight, bottled water, a first aid kit, cellphones and chargers, important documents and needed medications.

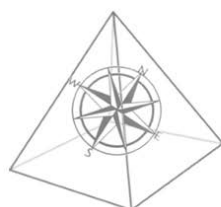
If you see a wildfire, call 911 immediately. If you are at home and hear reports of wildfires in your area, prepare to evacuate and listen to instructions from officials. Take precautions against inhaling dangerous smoke, such as keeping all doors and windows closed and listening for official air quality reports.

Remember: It is extremely important to heed instructions from officials to evacuate. As you evacuate, leave your home's indoor and outdoor lights on so your home can be seen through thick smoke. Shut off the gas before you leave. Also, leave doors and windows unlocked to assist firefighters.

If you are in a car and see a wildfire, stay in your car — do not try to outrun the fire on foot. Roll up your car windows and close the vents. Drive slowly and keep your headlights on. If you do have to stop, park away from heavy brush and vegetation.



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