

Wildfire / Forest Fire Disaster Preparedness Checklist

Before A Wild Fire

1. Purchase NOAA Emergency Weather Alert Radio equipped with S.A.M.E. Localized Programming or something similar to this one: <https://amzn.to/2yB5ARn>. If a wild fire is spotted in your area this will help to alert you to the danger. This also works for other weather related disasters as well.

2. Download the FEMA Disaster Alert App for your smartphone. This will help to alert you to a disaster in your area in case you are away from your home. You can load up to 5 locations and choose which disasters you want to be alerted for in your chosen areas.

3. Research / learn your community's evacuation plans and find several ways to leave the area. Drive the evacuation routes and find shelter locations along the way. Have a plan for your pets and livestock. You can get your county's disaster plans from your county emergency/disaster planning office (some counties may have a different name for this office, but the Fire Chief should be able to put you in contact with them). This video will also provide some additional points to consider related to route selection for bugging out: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oDkdYb39Z-I&t=9s>

4. Speak with the local fire department and ask them about the frequency of wildfires in your area and if they believe that the area where your home is located is an area that is likely to have a fire in the next few years. This will help you prioritize the urgency of preps in this area. Additionally, you can ask them if they would be willing to visit your home and make recommendations on what changes you can make at your residence based on your particular situation.

5. Review your home owners/renters insurance coverage to make sure it is enough to replace your personal property and home in the event of total fire destruction. Keep a copy of your policy in your Emergency Binder, as well as an electronic copy backed up on a cloud and on a flash drive or CD/DVD that is stored in your vehicle or bug out bag or at another off site location.

6. Make a video of the contents of your home and outbuildings this will help when making an insurance claim if a fire happens. With your cellphone or a video camera walk around the house slowly filming all of the contents. Make sure the video is clear by having all of the lights on and window shades open so that everything can be seen

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clearly. When filming walk every slow and call out the items that you are looking at as you go.

7. Ensure your home and neighborhood/subdivision has legible and clearly marked street names and numbers. Driveways should be at least 12 feet wide with a vertical distance of 15 feet cleared for emergency vehicle access. Having a large area for emergency vehicles to turn around or a circle drive is also helpful for the fire department.

8. Have Bug Out Bags, Get Home Bags and an Emergency Binder packed up and ready to go so that you can leave your home in short notice if needed. If you live in an area that is prone to regular forest fires consider getting a professional grade respirator / smoke mask for each member of the family (maybe a few extras for guests as well) to help avoid smoke inhalation.

9. Develop, discuss and practice an emergency action plan with everyone in your home. Include details for pets, large animals and livestock. Know at least two ways out of your neighborhood and have a pre-designated meeting place within walking distance from your home that is in a safe area that will not be affected by a forest fire.

10. Keep important documents and photographs in a fireproof place such as a fire rated safe. You should also keep copies in your emergency binder and be sure to have scanned copies on an encrypted and password protected cloud back up as well as a digital copy of all of the contents of your emergency binder.

General Preventative Actions To Take At The Home

There are 3 zones to be concerned with when it comes to forest fire prevention around your home. Zone 1 is 0 to 5 feet from the outside edge of the home. Zone 2 is 5 feet to 30 feet from your home. Zone 3 is 30 feet to 100 feet from your home. Ideally you would like to have all three zones landscaped and maintained in such a way that helps to prevent fires. Keeping this area free of dry dead flammable plant material, removing any dry dead wood and following the recommendations below will go a long way in helping to prevent a forest fire from burning down your home should one come your way.

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1. Make sure pine needles and leaf debris are removed from all gutters and the corners of the roof where the roof meets vertical wall sections. Set a reminder in your smartphone to clean these out twice a year as they can build up quickly in areas with numerous trees.

2. Clear brush, pine needles and leaf debris, dead shrubbery (ground fuel) at least 30 feet from your home. The further the better. Make sure to get under shrubs and bushes as well as any other nooks and crannies that you may ordinarily overlook.

3. Make sure tall weeds and grass or old vines are not growing on the sides of the house or outbuildings. Trimming the yard regularly with a weed eater will help to reduce a fire risk.

4. Make sure all dead standing trees around your home are cut down and removed.

5. Make sure to store gasoline and other highly flammable liquids in a storage container/shed at least 100 ft away from the house or as far away as practical/possible if you have a smaller parcel of land.

6. Trim branches that overhang the home, porch and deck and prune branches of large trees up to (depending on their height) 6 to 10 feet from the ground. You may want to consult an arborist to make sure that you do not damage the trees and stunt their growth.

7. Remove plants containing resins, oils and waxes and ensure to put down landscape material in the Immediate Zone (0 to 5 feet around the house) that are non-combustible options like crushed stone and gravel. Wood chip mulches are not great to have close to the home in areas that are prone to forest fires.

8. Inspect the roof yearly and use Class A rated roofing products for the best protection. Examples include: Composite shingles, steel or metal, concrete and clay tiles. Inspect shingles or roof tiles and replace or repair those that are loose or missing to prevent ember penetration. Metal and ceramic roofs are best for fire prevention. Cedar shake shingles are the worst and most likely to catch fire.

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9. Never store flammable materials or liquids (lawn mower gas can, etc) underneath decks or porches. Remove dead vegetation and debris from under decks/porches and between deck board joints.

10. Use fire resistant siding such as brick, masonry, cement, plaster or stucco and dual-pane tempered glass windows. Though replacing all siding with fire resistant materials may not be economically feasible, it may be more affordable to have a 3 to 4 foot section of masonry added to help prevent fire. From a prepping perspective this can also help to provide a higher degree (though not necessarily bulletproof) of ballistic protection as well.

11. Store firewood piles at least 30 feet away from the home.

12. Mow the lawn regularly to keep the grass short under 4 inches tall.

13. Landscape with fire resistant plants (<https://www.readyforwildfire.org/prepare-for-wildfire/get-ready/fire-resistant-landscaping/>)

14. Create small fuel breaks with hardscaping features and by spacing out any shrubs or bushes that you plant on your property. Also thin out the spacing of larger trees so that they are not crowded together. Think of trying to create a well groomed/maintained park, as opposed to a crowded forest in the 100 foot circle closest to your home.

15. Water bearing landscape features such as creeks, small ponds both natural and artificial are excellent sources of water for emergency services to draft from in an emergency if a hydrant is not available in rural areas. IBC totes can also be filled with water for emergency fire fighting purposes as well. Additionally, you may be able to draft from those water sources yourself if you needed to put out a fire on your own if you live in a very rural area. All that is needed is a Trash Water Pump and a few sets of hoses.

16. For very rural areas consider having some forest firefighting equipment on hand. Professional type equipment may be too expensive but improvising your own is fairly reasonable and can also be used for watering trees, and gardens, etc when there is no fire emergency. A small utility trailer with a couple of IBC totes piped together and a Trash Water Pump and some hoses and shut off valves can make a fairly effective improvised fire fighting rig for small to mid sized fires so that you can put out your own

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fires or quickly douse the roof and area around the base of your home if a large fire is coming your way.

17. Ensure you or the county prune back or cut away over hanging trees on the roads into your home. Trees that are too close to the roads can be a huge hazard for drivers during a forest fire. Calls/complaints to the county roads department should be the correct point of contact to get this done.

18. Make sure large propane tanks are oriented so that the ends are not pointing towards the any structure (homes, barns, sheds, etc). Propane tanks will typically explode out of the ends. This is a safety feature to keep from directing the blast towards a residence. If the ends of your propane tank are directed towards your home have it re-oriented by the propane company that fills your tank.

19. Exterior attic vents and soffett vents should be made of metal not plastic. Also make sure there they are backed with a fine wire screen mesh. 1/4 inch mesh is much too large, think more like typical aluminum window screen mesh approximately 1/16 inch or so. Smaller screens do a better job of keeping our embers and bugs!

20. Ensure your chimney(s) have a certified spark arrestor on them and make sure that all branches are trimmed back at least 20 feet from the chimney.

21. Make sure there are no straw/hay bales or creosote soaked railroad ties close to the exterior of your home or other structures.

22. Make sure out buildings and sheds and chicken coops and other similar outbuildings are all located at least 30 feet from the home. The further back the better. Also make sure to apply all of the principles in this checklist around those buildings as well.

23. Make sure deck furniture is non flammable and make sure any pillows are taken inside or are made of fire resistant material if they are left outside during high fire times.

24. Aspen trees rarely burn even when other tress around them do. These are great for planting closer to the home.

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25. Do not have small fire wood piles on or under the deck or porches of the home.

26. If you have shrubs up next to the home make sure to prune out all dead material yearly and pick up all dead material from underneath the shrubs as well. If the shrubs are all green material and well maintained they generally do not present a significant fire hazard.

What To Do When A Forest Fire Is Burning Near Your Home and You Are Evacuating.

1. Follow all evacuation orders given by public officials. It is better to leave early and get to safety. If you have followed the advice above and you have proper insurance coverage you can replace anything that is lost. You cannot replace lives that are lost in attempts to fight fires that are much too big to handle. Always evacuate if you feel it's unsafe to stay – don't necessarily wait to receive an emergency notification if you feel threatened from the fire. **IMPORTANT NOTE:** Only accomplish the following items if you have sufficient time to safely accomplish them before evacuating. If the fire is imminent leave as quickly as possible.

2. Grab your Bug Out Bags and Emergency Binder and load them into vehicles so that you are ready to go.

3. Turn off propane tanks at main valve on the tank.

4. Close all outbuilding doors and windows.

5. Close all home windows and doors, seal all air ducts, use wide duct tape to seal off doors and vents. This will help to minimize the smoke damage inside the home and to keep smoke out should you become trapped in the home.

6. Do NOT attempt a "burn back" or do a "controlled burn" to clear debris out away from your home before the fire arrives unless you are highly trained in woodland firefighting and have the means to be able to properly control the fire. Very few people have this training or experience so please do not attempt it will only make things worse.

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7. Wet down walls and roofs with a hose. You can even place a portable sprinkler on top of the roof and leave the hose turned on to keep the roof wet after you leave. Make sure the hose is routed up the side of the house that is furthest away from the approaching fire so that it does not melt as quickly.

8. Turn on lawn sprinklers and let them run if you have them.

9. Implement your plan for dealing with your livestock.

10. Leave a large message that you have evacuated taped to the inside of a screen door so that Firefighters will be able to quickly see that you have left the home.

What To Do When A Forest Fire Is Burning Near Your Home and You Are NOT Able To Evacuate.

Note: This list assumes that you did not have sufficient warning or were not physically capable to evacuate and now the fire is surrounding your home and you have no physical way to evacuate the area. You should ALWAYS evacuate well before the fire arrives if it is at all possible!

Outside Your Shelter (if you have time to safely accomplish these items).

1. Strategically place sprinklers to wet your down home and surroundings, and turn them on.
2. Protect some hoses from flames and have them ready to use once the fire front has passed to extinguish smaller fires left around the home.
3. Close exterior doors and windows, but leave them unlocked.
4. Close or cover outside attic, eave, and basement vents to prevent embers from entering.
5. Move all flammable materials at least 30-feet away from your shelter, including vehicles, ATVs and recreational equipment, lawn furniture, and firewood.
6. Plan for loss of power. Have emergency generators ready to power your well's pump/home after the fire passes through the area.
7. Store water in large bulk containers for putting out burning embers or small fires after the fire front has passed. Consider using large stock tanks, IBC totes, etc.
8. Shut off natural gas and propane.
9. Open wooden privacy fence gates to prevent flames from spreading from a fence to your home.

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Get Inside Your Shelter and Stay Inside until the fire has passed!

1. Close all windows and doors.
2. Tape shut all doors and windows and HVAC vents with wide duct tape
3. Place wet towels under door and window openings.
4. Completely fill sinks, tubs, and as many 5 gallon buckets as you have with water for extinguishing any fire that breaks out inside your home.
5. Have fire extinguishers, flashlights and batteries and emergency smoke masks and fire blankets out and ready.
6. Close metal window blinds.
7. Remove all flammable window treatments, drapes, curtains, etc.
8. Move all furniture away from windows and sliding glass doors towards the center of the room.
9. Turn off the HVAC system.
10. Turn off any attic fans, whole house fans, swamp coolers, and interior fans to keep smoke and ash from being drawn into the structure.
11. Bring pets inside and place them in carriers.
12. Leave exterior and interior lights on (even though the power may go out) to help firefighters find you and your house in dense smoke.
13. Completely Soak/Wet down several thick blankets and keep them in a pile near you in case you need to cover your body with them if fire gets too close and you cannot put it out. You can use the wet blankets to put out the fire or put over the top of you in case you cannot fight off the fire. Note: Cotton blankets work best. Nylon and polyester blankets could make any burns sustained worse.
14. If possible change into cotton clothing. Do not wear polyester or nylon clothing as it is more difficult to treat burns if you were wearing clothing that “melts”.
15. Locate an area in the center of the home on a lower level away from windows and glass doors. Ideally this room will have tile or concrete floors. Make sure the room has a doorway to the exterior of the house if possible. A Walkout basement may be suitable.
16. Make sure to have ALL of your fire extinguishers out sitting near you and ready to use.

Trapped in Your Vehicle

A structure will offer more protection than a car, so if there is a building nearby, get inside it. Otherwise, park and stay in your car. It will be safer than being in the open, where you would be directly exposed to flames and radiant heat.

1. Park the vehicle in an open area with little to no vegetation that is away from trees and other flammable material.
2. STAY IN THE VEHICLE.
3. Turn on headlights and emergency flashers to make your car more visible in heavy smoke. Honk the horn if you think rescue may be near by.

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4. Leave the vehicle running in case you are able to drive the vehicle to a safer location. For instance if a fire passes through and burns out a near by area it may be advantageous to drive the vehicle into that are that is already burnt up.
5. Close all windows and doors, shut off air vents, and turn off the air conditioner.
6. Get under blankets or coats, preferably wool or cotton to help protect you from the heat and breaking glass.
7. Wait until the fire front passes and the outside temperature has dropped. Then get out and go to a safe area that has already burned.
8. Treat injuries as needed.