

## **Firefighters' Advice for Protecting Your Home Against Wildfires**

If you live in an area that is at risk of wildfire, it's important that you have a plan in place to not only protect your home using your own resources, but also through cooperation from neighbors and working with local first responders to ensure they have access to your property.

Meanwhile, many insurers are imposing stringent requirements on homeowners in at-risk areas to "harden" their homes against wildfires in order to underwrite a policy.

The following are the latest tips that fire departments are recommending to homeowners living in high-risk areas.

### **Optimize your roof and deck**

Fire-proofing the exterior of your home is of utmost importance if you want to avoid seeing it burned to the ground. You can do this by choosing Class A roofing material that is fire-resistant, such as:

- Asphalt shingles
- Clay or concrete tiles
- Metal roofing
- Slate tiles

Obviously if you have a wood shingle roof the best option is to replace it, but that can be expensive. If you cannot afford to replace the roof, consider treating it with fire-retardant coating and/or install a rooftop sprinkler system. If you have a wooden deck, you should do the same to that.

Regular maintenance and inspections are key to protecting your home:

- Check your roof regularly for missing, cracked or broken tiles and shingles, and repair as necessary.
- Caulk any cracks you find in your roof or siding.
- Keep your roof, gutters and deck clear of debris like dead leaves and pine needles.

### **Block possible ember entry points**

One of the most common ways homes catch fire is when embers enter the home or attic.

**Eaves** ▯” The main objective of eaves protection is to stop fire from getting into the attic. If you have eaves with an exposed underside (where you can see the supporting wood), you can use ignition-resistant materials or noncombustible materials on the underside. Or you can box the underside to block off entry points for embers.

**Vents and other openings** ▯” Screen vents and other openings, and consider sealing them as well.

**Windows** ▯” Install dual-paned, tempered-glass windows that are manufactured to stand up to high temperatures

### **Create a defensible space**

To protect your home, and more than likely comply with your homeowner's insurer's requirements, you need to create a defensible space of up to 100 feet around it. Fire safety regulations cover three zones around your home that will need different types of care:

**Zone 1: 0 to 5 feet** ▯” Remove any flammable materials from this area, including furniture. If you have plants remove all dead material. Consider installing hard surfaces, such as a concrete walkway, or use noncombustible mulch products, such as rock.

Remove dead vegetation and implement a maintenance strategy to keep the 5-foot zone clear of dead plant materials. Remove anything stored underneath decks or porches.

**Zone 2: 5 to 30 feet** ▯” Make sure to plant and maintain trees and shrubs in well-spaced clusters. Remove dead plants and tree branches. Maintain trees by allowing at least 18 feet between crowns. Prune tree branches up to 12 feet (do not exceed one-third of the tree height).

Keep lawns mowed to a height of 4 inches. Pare back tree limbs that are closer than 10 feet from the house. Limit trees and shrubs to small clusters of a few each.

**Zone 3: 30 feet and beyond** ▯” Plant and maintain trees and shrubs in well-spaced clusters. Remove dead plants and tree branches. Trees 30 to 60 feet from the home should have at least 12 feet between canopy tops, and 10 feet for homes 60 feet and further from the home. Prune lower tree branches. Remove dead plant, debris and tree material.

### **Ensure firefighter access**

Make sure your house number is clearly marked for firefighters to see and that your driveway is wide enough to accommodate fire-fighting equipment. If you have a long driveway or road, ensure that it's wide enough for a fire engine.

## **Work with your neighbors**

Work with your neighbors to create a preparation and response plan for wildfires. You'll all be in it together if your neighborhood is threatened. Working with them will improve the chances of identifying and mitigating risks that may endanger your neighborhood ahead of a wildfire.

## **Resources**

For more details of how to harden your home against wildfire, check out the wealth of information at the [National Fire Protection Association's website](#).

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