

## **WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS**

An average of 1.2 million acres of U.S. woodlands burn every year and more than four out of every five wildfires are caused by people. If you live where there is an abundance of trees, plants and other vegetation that can easily catch fire, you may be vulnerable to wildfires and you should take the following three simple steps to prepare.

### **Step 1: Build an Evacuation Kit**

Build an Emergency Evacuation Kit, which includes items like non-perishable food, water, a battery-powered or hand-crank radio, extra flashlights and batteries. You may want to prepare a portable kit and keep it in your car. This kit should include:

- Copies of prescription medications and medical supplies;
- Bedding and clothing, including sleeping bags and pillows;
- Bottled water, a battery-operated radio and extra batteries, a first aid kit, a flashlight;
- Copies of important documents: driver's license, Social Security card, proof of residence, insurance policies, wills, deeds, birth and marriage certificates, tax records, etc.
- Pre-pack non-replaceable, personal items that you can quickly move to a vehicle if you are instructed to evacuate your home.

### **Step 2: Make a Plan**

- Make a Family Emergency Plan. Your family may not be together when disaster strikes, so it is important to know how you will contact one another, how you will get back together and what you will do in case of an emergency.
- Plan places where your family will meet, both within and outside of your immediate neighborhood.
- It may be easier to make a long-distance phone call than to call across town, so an out-of-town contact may be in a better position to communicate among separated family members.
- You may also want to inquire about emergency plans at places where your family spends time: work, daycare and school. If no plans exist, consider volunteering to help create one.
- Plan to Evacuate
  - Identify ahead of time where your family will meet, both within and outside of your immediate neighborhood.
  - Identify several places you could go in an emergency, a friend's home in another town, a motel or public shelter.
  - If you do not have a car, plan alternate means of evacuating.
  - If you have a car, keep a half tank of gas in it at all times in case you need to evacuate.
  - Take your Emergency Evacuation Kit.
  - Take your pets with you, but understand that only service animals may be permitted in public shelters. Plan how you will care for your pets in an emergency.
- Report hazardous conditions that could cause a wildfire.
- Teach children about fire safety. Keep matches out of their reach.
- Teach each family member how to use the fire extinguisher (ABC type) and show them where it's kept.

### Step 3: PREPARE YOUR HOME

- Protect your property from wildfires by designing and landscaping your home with wildfire safety in mind.
- Select materials and plants that can help contain fire rather than fuel it.
- Use fire resistant or non-combustible materials on the roof and exterior structure of the dwelling. Treat wood or combustible material used in roofs, siding, decking or trim with UL-approved fire-retardant chemicals.
- Plant fire-resistant shrubs and trees. For example, hardwood trees are less flammable than pine, evergreen, eucalyptus or fir trees.
- Regularly clean roof and gutters.
- Inspect chimneys at least twice a year. Clean them at least once a year. Keep the dampers in good working order. Equip chimneys and stovepipes with a spark arrester that meets the requirements of National Fire Protection Association Code 211. (Contact your local fire department for exact specifications.)
- Use 1/2-inch mesh screen beneath porches, decks, floor areas and the home itself. Also, screen openings to floors, roof and attic.
- Install a smoke detector on each level of your home, especially near bedrooms; test monthly and change the batteries at least once each year.
- Keep a ladder that will reach the roof.
- Consider installing protective shutters or heavy fire-resistant drapes.
- Keep handy household items that can be used as fire tools: a rake, axe, handsaw or chainsaw, bucket and shovel.
- Identify and maintain an adequate outside water source such as a small pond, cistern, well, swimming pool or hydrant.
- Have a garden hose that is long enough to reach any area of the home and other structures on the property.
- Install freeze-proof exterior water outlets on at least two sides of the home and near other structures on the property. Install additional outlets at least 50 feet from the home.
- Consider obtaining a portable gasoline-powered pump in case electrical power is cut off.
- Create a 30- to 100-Foot Safety Zone Around Your Home:
  - Within this area, you can take steps to reduce potential exposure to flames and radiant heat. Homes built in pine forests should have a minimum safety zone of 100 feet. If your home sits on a steep slope, standard protective measures may not suffice. Contact your local fire department or forestry of fire for additional information.
  - Rake leaves, dead limbs and twigs. Clear all flammable vegetation.
  - Remove leaves and rubbish from under structures and dispose of them properly.
  - Thin a 15-foot space between tree crowns, and remove limbs within 15 feet of the ground.
  - Remove dead branches that extend over the roof.
  - Prune tree branches and shrubs within 15 feet of a stovepipe or chimney outlet.
  - Ask the power company to clear branches from power lines.
  - Remove vines from the walls of the home.
  - Mow grass regularly.
  - Clear a 10-foot area around propane tanks and the barbecue. Place a screen over the grill—use non-flammable material with mesh no coarser than one-quarter inch.
  - Regularly dispose of newspapers and rubbish at an approved site. Follow local burning regulations.
  - Place stove, fireplace and grill ashes in a metal bucket, soak in water for two days, then bury the cold ashes in mineral soil.

- Store gasoline, oily rags and other flammable materials in approved safety cans. Place cans in a safe location away from the base of buildings.
- Stack firewood at least 100 feet away and uphill from your home. Clear combustible material within 20 feet. Use only UL-approved wood-burning devices.