

PROTECT YOURSELF FROM the threat of wildland fire

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Though there still may be snow on mountain tops or green grass in the fields, it is never too early to prepare for wildland fire. The actions listed below are to be taken before a wildland fire occurs to reduce the risk of loss of life and property. These tasks primarily focus on the home and 30 feet around the home, an area known as the “home ignition zone.”

Move Firewood Away From House

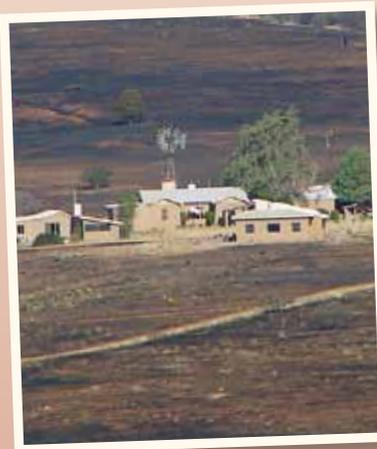
There is nothing more convenient than having firewood just outside your door on cold, winter days, but with warmer months approaching, it is best to store your firewood at least 30 feet away from your home. Whether it is embers that find their way into the firewood or burning grass next to your deck, the risk of ignition of firewood is high. Storing firewood at least 30 feet from the home during summer months greatly reduces the chance of firewood igniting the home. When selecting a stacking area, select an area 30 feet uphill or at the same level as your home because if the firewood does ignite, fire will spread slower toward your home when moving downhill than it will moving uphill.

Clear Gutters, Eaves, and Roof of Debris

Clear your gutters, eaves, and roof from dead leaves and pine needles. Keeping these areas clean not only helps melting snow and rain flow where it is supposed to, it also minimizes the risk of embers from a

wildland fire igniting those materials on your roof.

Although a grass fire or forest fire may be miles away and fire crews are fighting the fire in the distance, embers, also known as firebrands, can be carried over a mile by wind. Clearing your gutters, eaves, and roof of flammable debris will help protect your home from a wildland fire.



Screen Vents

The goal of screening your vents is to prevent penetration from direct flame and firebrands. Screen all vents with a 1/8-inch metal screening. Be sure to screen your gable end vents, roof vents, dryer vents, foundation vents, and heater or fresh air vents. Soffits are most vulnerable, so be sure no large plants are at the ground line directly below soffit vents.



Clean Under Deck and Around Home

Houses are often destroyed by flames that ignite combustible material under or adjacent to decks, stairways, and overhangs. To avoid this threat, do not store combustible materials under decks, on stairs, or along side your house. Keep areas under and next to your home free of pine needles, long grass, leaves, or other combustible material. Surrounding your house foundation with a thin layer of gravel or rock is also a very effective way to lower the chances of ignition.

Plant Fire-Resistant Plants

Though any plant will burn if it is dry enough, there are plants that are more resistant to fire than others. Plant choice, spacing, and maintenance are critical. When landscaping around your home you want to be sure to consider plants with high moisture content, deciduous trees, and salt tolerant plants. Examples of fire-resistant plant species adapted to Montana include lamb's ear, flax, daylily, yucca, columbine, kinnickinnick, lavender, yarrow, thyme, quaking aspen, wild strawberry, poppy, maple, and buffaloberry. Plants with high resin (flammable natural organic substances in plants) content tend to be most readily flammable. Many native plants in arid environments, such as sagebrush, juniper, and pine are very resinous. A Montana State University Extension MontGuide titled Fire-Resistant

Plants for Montana Landscapes contains a full list of fire-resistant plants and can be viewed at www.msuextension.org/publications/YardandGarden/MT200101AG.pdf.

Remove Dead and Over-Grown Vegetation

Keeping the area around your home “lean and clean” to a distance of at least 30 feet is desirable. Be sure to remove standing dead and downed trees and shrubs. Prune dead leaves, branches, twigs, and needles on mature trees to a height of 10 feet or one-third of the tree’s height. Cut out dried and “cured” grasses and wildflowers. While you may do these activities yearly for plant improvement or aesthetic purposes, you are also increasing the protection of your home from wildland fire.

Ensure Your Home Is Clearly Marked

It is critical for emergency response crews to be able to locate your home in the event of a fire or medical emergency. Clearly display your address at the front of your driveway to help firefighters find your home. The numbers should be easy to read during the day and at night. If you are interested in reflective address numbers for your property, contact your local fire department.

Trim Tree Branches Overhanging Your Roof

If you have trees close to your home, it is important to prune the tree branches at least 10 feet away from the roof. If you have a chimney, tree branches should be pruned at least 15 feet up from the ground. These practices reduce the risk of your roof starting on fire from the tree dropping embers on it or sparks from your chimney starting the tree on fire and igniting your roof.

Thin Trees and Brush

Thin trees and brush along your driveway and road to ensure evacuation safety. It is essential to clear all roadside vegetation 10 feet out from the road’s edge and to remove all obstructions that hang over the road. Driveways with large amounts of flammable material next to them are a deterrent to firefighters. Make driveways and roadsides less threatening by clearing all flammable vegetation.



Mow and Water Grass Around Home

Limiting the amount of vegetation and increasing its moisture content around your home will keep embers or firebrands from igniting and spreading fire in your yard. If watering your grass is not an option during the summer months, mowing the grass will at least slow the fire’s rate of spread.

Establish an Evacuation Plan

Establish and practice a family evacuation plan and meeting location. Practice exit drills with your family. Identify a reliable source where you can get fire updates when wildland fire becomes a potential threat.

Your house is more likely to withstand a wildland fire if grasses, brush, trees, and other natural and man-made fuels are managed to reduce a fire’s intensity, however, it is also important to remember that there are no guarantees when wildland fire occurs in extreme conditions. For more information on protecting your home and property from wildland fire, contact your local fire department or visit www.firesafemt.org. ■

