



Protecting Properties from Grass, Brush, and Wildfire

Each year, wild-land fires destroy hundreds of buildings and more than 4,000,000 acres of land. Property owners located in suburban and rural areas can take steps to reduce the likelihood of property loss from these fires. For those properties located in areas designated by an authority having jurisdiction (AHJ) as wilderness interface areas, a full hazard assessment should be conducted, as outlined in Chapter 17 of NFPA 1-2012, Fire Code, published by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA).

This client handout provides some simple loss prevention steps to reduce the likelihood of losses from grass, brush, and wildfires.

Property Access

Properties should have well-maintained access roads, large enough to allow evacuation of the occupants and the simultaneous entry of fire department vehicles.

- At a minimum, roads should be at least 12-ft (3.6-m) wide, per lane of travel and have a vertical clearance of at least 13.5 ft (4.1 m). Single lane of travel (one-way) roads, should be at least 16-ft (4.8-m) wide.
- Roads and driveways should not have more than a 10-percent grade.
- Dead-end roads, longer than 300 ft (91.4 m), should be provided with a turnaround having a radius of at least 60 ft (18.3 m).
- Roads and parking areas should be designed to accommodate fire department vehicles having lengths up to 38 ft (11 m) and a turning radius of 48 ft (14.6 m).
- Access should be provided for buildings when any point of a building's exterior is located more than 150 ft (45.7 m) from a roadway.

Fuel Reduction Area

To prevent the spread of wild-land fires to buildings, fuel reduction areas should be established. These represent areas of increasingly reduced fuel loading as the structure is approached.

- Landscaping within 5 ft (4.5 m) of structures should be limited to nonflammable materials, such as artificial mulches and high-moisture-content annuals and perennials.
- Tree branches and vegetation should be trimmed so that branches are not hanging over roofs or within 10 ft (3 m) of chimneys.
- Dead vegetation, combustibles, wood stacks, etc. should be excluded from within 30 ft (9 m) of any structures.
- At least a 30-ft (9-m) separation should be maintained between buildings and other exposures, such as automobiles, fuel tanks, outside storage areas, or high grass or wooded areas. This open area should be limited to well-irrigated small plants and grass.
- Shade trees should be spaced so that a 30-ft (9-m) separation is maintained from buildings.
- Keep grass within 30 ft (9 m) of structures mowed to less than 4-in (10-cm) high.
- Trees should be trimmed so that branches are not less than 6 ft (2 m) from the ground.

Building Design

Buildings should be constructed using nationally recognized building codes and include designs that afford protection from hostile fires. Good practices include:

- Roof vents should be covered with fire- and corrosion-resistant screens, having no opening larger than 0.25 in (7.6 cm).
- Chimneys should be provided with a spark arrester, constructed of not less than #12 gauge wire, with no opening larger than 0.5 in (15.2 cm).
- Exterior openings, including windows and doors, should have at least a 20-minute fire-resistance rating.
- Overhangs, eaves, decks, and balconies should be constructed from heavy timber, non-combustible materials or otherwise have at least a one-hour fire-resistance rating.
- Stationary mobile homes (i.e., those located on a site) should be provided with a non-combustible skirting on all sides having a fire-resistive rating of at least 20 minutes.

Emergency Planning

In order to better protect a property in the event of a wildfire, homeowners can take some basic steps that will reduce the loss of life and property, including:

- Monitor weather and fire index conditions and prepare to evacuate early.
- Have a fire exit escape plan.
- Provide for garden hoses on all sides of structures.
- Back cars into garages, for a smoother escape.

Evacuation

Prior to evacuating, if time permits, property owners should:

- Pre-wet lawns and shrubs, within 5 ft (1.5 m) of the building, before evacuating.
- Move furniture to the center of the room before evacuating. This will reduce the chance of furniture ignition from radiant heat through windows.
- Close all interior and exterior doors, windows, and other openings.
- Shut down heating and air-conditioning systems.
- Turn off fuel supplies, such as propane.

Contact

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