



Free eNews from your Hayward Fire Department-

Planning for Urban Wildfire



Homeowners evacuated to safety watch the destructive progress of a wildfire in their community.

Fire primarily in the hills can occur in the Hayward and Fairview District where urban interface areas can pose threats to citizens and homes. An urban interface fire can create complex challenges for firefighters. If you live in or near an urban/wildland area, it is important to design and maintain your home and landscaping with wildfire safety in mind. If you follow simple steps to make your home fire safe inside and out, you not only reduce the threat to your property but you help protect your home and family, too.

Living in these areas means you should understand some basics about wildfire and be prepared. Construction materials, landscaping plants and design, surrounding wildland fuels, the location of your home on a slope or flat area, and more are all factors that affect your exposure to, and threat from, wildfire.

Understanding the Basics

Fuel

Fuel includes anything that will burn - trees, shrubs, grass, homes, fences, decks, sheds, and more. Unchecked, an urban wildfire makes no distinction between wildland and urban fuels - between grass or trees and your home. Things you do, however, can alter a fire's behavior and reduce your risk.

Low-lying fuels such as grass and shrubs can often carry a fire more quickly than larger fuels but often at lower intensities and with shorter flame lengths. But if they have a continuous path to your deck or your home, they can burn your home as easily as fire in larger fuels.

Just as firefighters create firebreaks in the wildland, it's important for you to create space between plants and establish breaks in your landscaping to alter a fire's path to your home.

Ladder fuels are grasses, brush, and shrubs that can carry fire from low-lying surface vegetation up into tall trees. You can help keep a fire near the surface, and generally less intense, by trimming or removing these ladder fuels near trees, along with keeping low-hanging branches trimmed up to a minimum of six feet above the ground.

Crown fuels are tall trees. Fires in these fuels are difficult to manage and often pose the greatest threats due to high temperatures, high burn intensities, long flame lengths, the probability of spreading embers far distances, and more. Stands of trees on your property should be thinned to create space between them, with branches trimmed up off the ground. Trees adjacent to and touching your home are best removed.

Weather

Weather is a critical factor in affecting a fire's intensity and rate of spread. High temperatures, low humidity, and wind can make a wildfire in grass or brush every bit as dangerous and threatening as a crown fire and worsen the intensity and spread of crown fires. A long dry spell or drought conditions only intensify a wildfire's behavior and threat.

When considering your home, it's perhaps most important to understand that wind can carry embers and firebrands up to a mile or more from the main fire. These embers landing on a roof or in rain gutters cluttered with leaves or other flammable debris, or getting trapped under or on decks, are responsible for many home losses every year.

Terrain



A home located at or near the top of a slope is at a greater risk and requires proper landscape management.

The location of your home with respect to the surrounding terrain is also a critical factor to consider. Fires tend to burn upslope with greater speed and intensity than downhill or across flat areas. This effect is made worse if the upslope includes a narrow drainage, called a chimney, which can funnel and intensify the wind and flames.

A home located at or near the top of a slope is at a greater risk, and will require proper landscape management for a greater distance downhill than on flat ground to achieve the same threat reduction.

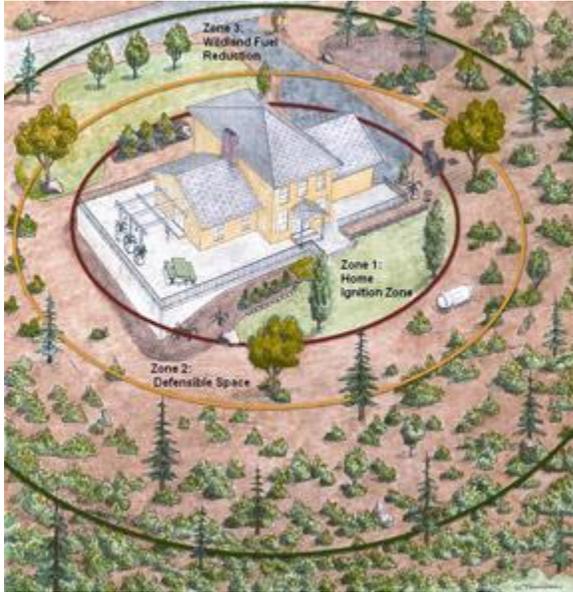
What Can You Do?

There are two primary goals in reducing the fire threat and better protecting your home and property. One is to reduce the exposure and flammability of your home. This can involve one or more steps ranging from installing a fire-resistant roof to simply clearing debris from under decks, keeping your roof and rain gutters free of leaves and other flammable material, and storing firewood away from the house.

The second goal is to reduce and manage the fuels surrounding your home to be fire-resistant. This ranges from keeping the landscaping low and clean near your home to raking up leaves and other debris and keeping enough space between trees and plants to slow an approaching fire.

Think and Act in Zones

When preparing your property to withstand a wildfire, it's useful to think in terms of zones and consider the area as far as 200 feet from your home. In some cases this may require working with neighbors or other land owners, too.



"Think in terms of zones when preparing your property to withstand a fire." - [Click here to Enlarge](#)

Zone 1: Home Ignition Zone

The most critical area is your home ignition zone, which includes your home itself and the landscaping within 30 feet. Remember: windblown embers or firebrands can ignite a home while leaving the surrounding vegetation untouched or only charred. Some tips to better protect this zone include:

- Clear fallen leaves or other woody debris from rain gutters and off the roof.
- Clear all vegetation and debris from under decks and touching the foundation.
- Be sure all eaves and attic vents are screened with a small, ¼-inch screen.
- Move stacks of firewood away from the structure.
- Keep vegetation in this area trimmed low, well-irrigated, and free of dead material and spaced apart to prevent a continuous path of fuel to your home.

Zone 2: Defensible Space Zone

This is the second most critical zone and includes the area from 30 to 100 feet from your home.

- Remove dead and dying grass, shrubs and trees.
- Reduce the density of vegetation and ladder fuels by thinning and keeping them free of dead material.
- Replace hazardous vegetation with less flammable, irrigated landscaping, including lawn or low growing ground cover and flowering plants.

Zone 3: Wildland Fuel Reduction Zone

In this zone, from about 100 feet and beyond, remove dense undergrowth and thin out densely-crowded smaller trees. Experts recommend keeping 10 feet of space between trees and shrubs. Mature trees should be limbed up 6 to feet above the ground to prevent fire from reaching.

While there are many steps that can be taken to enhance the survivability of your home and property when wildfire occurs, it's important to remember that each step you take, no matter how small, can make a large difference. Multiple steps together can vastly improve the resistance to fire and subsequent losses.

When Fire Strikes

If you wait until there is smoke in the air to take fire-safe steps around your property, it's too late. When a fire occurs near you, be prepared to evacuate.

- Park your car facing out of the garage or in the direction you will be leaving.
- Gather important and irreplaceable photos, documents, heirlooms and your pets and put them in your car.
- Put flammable deck or patio furniture inside; move all flammable furniture away from windows.
- Close all windows, doors, vents, blinds, and non-flammable window coverings.
- If possible shut off all gas or propane utilities.
- Leave a porch or outside light on.
- Listen to local TV or radio for evacuation news. Local authorities may also notify you by driving through your neighborhood with loudspeakers.
- Leave *immediately* when asked to do so.

Every year across our Nation, some homes survive - while many others do not - after a major urban wildfire. Those that survive almost always do so because their owners had prepared for the eventuality of fire, which is an inescapable force of nature in fire-prone areas.

Remember, if it's predictable, it's preventable!

For more information on Disaster Preparedness related materials please see our website at: www.hayward-ca.gov click on the red "Disaster Preparedness" button or contact the Hayward Fire Department Emergency Services Office for additional information at (510) 583-4948.