

COUNTY OF CLARION

CITIZENS GUIDE
TO
DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

WILDLAND FIRES



The threat of wild land fires for people living near wild land areas or using recreational facilities in wilderness areas is real. Advance planning and knowing how to protect buildings in these areas can lessen the devastation of a wild land fire.

BEFORE A FIRE:

- ❖ Learn and teach safe fire practices:
 - Build fires away from nearby trees or bushes.
 - Always have a way to extinguish the fire quickly and completely.
 - Never leave a fire -- even a cigarette - burning unattended.
- ❖ Obtain local building codes and weed abatement ordinances for structures built near wooded areas.
- ❖ Use fire resistant materials when building, renovating or retrofitting structures.
- ❖ Create a safety zone to separate the home from combustible plants and vegetation:
 - Stone walls can act as heat shields and deflect flames.
 - Swimming pools and patios can be a safety zone.
- ❖ Check for fire hazards around home:
 - Install electrical lines underground, if possible. Keep all tree and shrub limbs trimmed so they don't come in contact with the wires.
 - Prune all branches around the residence to a height of 8 to 10 feet. Keep trees adjacent to buildings free of dead or dying wood and moss.
 - Remove all dead limbs, needles and debris from rain gutters.
 - Store combustible or flammable materials in approved safety containers and keep them away from the house.
 - Keep chimney clean.
 - Avoid open burning completely, and especially during the dry season.
- ❖ Install smoke detectors on every level of your home and near sleeping areas.
- ❖ Make evacuation plans from home and from the neighborhood. Plan several routes in case the fire blocks your escape route.
- ❖ Have disaster supplies on hand:
 - Flashlight with extra batteries.
 - Portable battery-operated radio and extra batteries.
 - First aid kit and manual.
 - Emergency food and water.
 - Non-electric can opener.
 - Essential medicines.
 - Cash and credit cards.
 - Sturdy shoes.
- ❖ Develop an emergency communication plan.
- ❖ In case family members are separated from one another during a wild land fire (a real possibility during the day when adults are at work and children are at school), have a plan for getting back together.
- ❖ Ask an out-of-state relative or friend to serve as the "family contact." After a disaster, it's often easier to call long distance. Make sure everyone knows the name, address and phone number of the contact person.

FIRE-RESISTANT BUILDING MATERIALS:

- ❖ Avoid using wooden shakes and shingles for a roof. Use tile, stucco, metal siding, brick, concrete block, rock or other fire-resistant materials. Use only thick, tempered safety glass in large windows and sliding glass doors.
- ❖ The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), in conjunction with the Office of the State Fire Commissioner, have developed an excellent guidance document for rural areas and communities. The "Wild land/Urban Interface Guidance Document" is available from DCNR.
- ❖ You might also want to contact your local emergency management office or American Red Cross Chapter for more information on wild land fires.
- ❖ Turn on a battery-operated radio to get the latest emergency information.
- ❖ Remove combustible items from around the house:
 - Lawn and poolside furniture.
 - Umbrellas.
 - Tarp coverings.
 - Firewood.
- ❖ Take down flammable drapes and curtains and close all Venetian blinds or noncombustible window coverings.
- ❖ Take action to protect your home.
 - Close all doors and windows inside your home to prevent draft.
 - Close gas valves and turn off all pilot lights.
 - Turn on a light in each room for visibility in heavy smoke.
 - Place valuables that will not be damaged by water in a pool or pond.
 - If hoses and adequate water are available, leave sprinklers on roofs and anything that might be damaged by fire.
- ❖ Be ready to evacuate all family members and pets when fire nears or when instructed to do so by local officials.

AFTER A FIRE:

Take care when re-entering a burned wild land area. Hot spots can flare up without warning. Check the roof immediately and extinguish any sparks or embers. Check the attic for hidden burning sparks. For several hours afterward, re-check for smoke and sparks throughout the home.

IF TRAPPED IN A WILDLAND FIRE:

You cannot outrun a fire. Crouch in a pond or river. Cover head and upper body with wet clothing. If water is not around, look for shelter in a cleared area or among a bed of rocks. Lie flat and cover body with wet clothing or soil. Breathe the air close to the ground through a wet cloth to avoid scorching lungs or inhaling smoke.

MITIGATION:

Mitigation includes any activities that prevent an emergency, reduce the chance of an emergency happening, or lessen the damaging effects of unavoidable emergencies. Investing in preventive mitigation steps now such as installing a spark arrestor on your chimney, cleaning roof surfaces and gutters regularly and using only fire resistant materials on the exterior of your home will help reduce the impact of wild land fires in the future. For more information on mitigation, contact your local emergency management office.