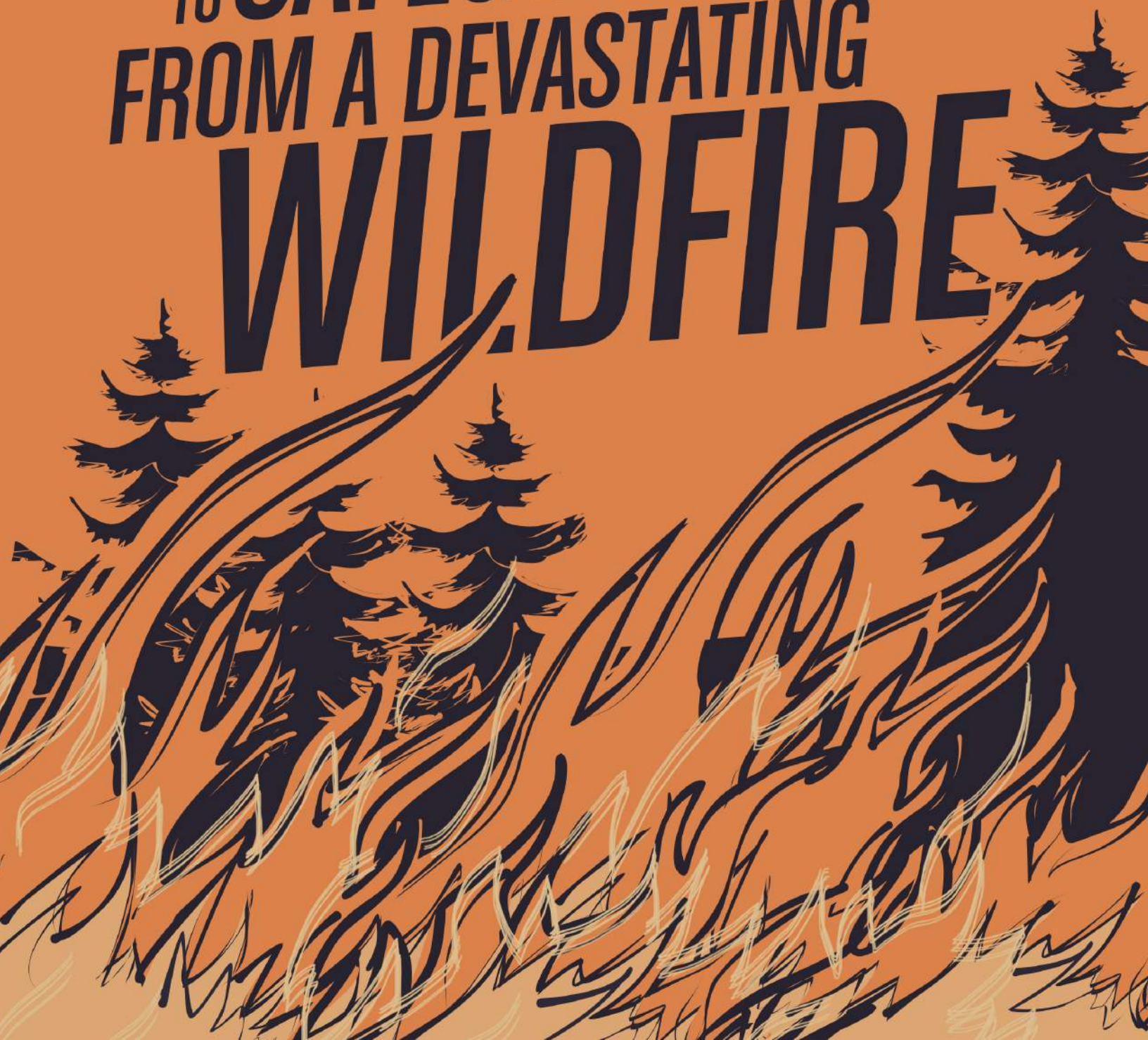


**SURVIVING THE BLAZE:**

**HOW TO SAFEGUARD YOUR HOME & FAMILY**

**FROM A DEVASTATING**

**WILDFIRE**



# **SURVIVING THE BLAZE:**

How to Safeguard your Home and Family  
From a Devastating Wildfire

## **INTRODUCTION**

Wildfires are an ever increasing problem in America and much of the world. Expanding housing developments, “no harvest” programs that leave dry brush and trees littering public lands, and the extreme drought around the country have all made wildfires more likely than ever. Yet most people are unaware of the problem until it’s too late to protect their homes.

Fires can and do happen almost everywhere.

## Inside This Report

INTRODUCTION	<b>1</b>
HOW TO PROTECT YOUR PROPERTY	<b>4</b>
PROTECT YOUR FAMILY	<b>10</b>
MORE ADVANCED PREPARATION	<b>16</b>
KNOW WHAT TO DO & WHAT TO TAKE WHEN YOU LEAVE	<b>20</b>
KNOW WHEN TO HEAD OUT	<b>22</b>
AVOID CAUSING A WILDFIRE	<b>19</b>
CONCLUSION	<b>28</b>
REFERENCES	<b>30</b>

In 2012 alone, 84,400 wildfires burned 11,198,072 acres across the United States, according to the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC). Every state in the union reported at least one wildfire, with the Eastern Great Basin Geographic Area, the Northern Rockies, Northwest and Rocky Mountain Geographic Areas reporting the most fires.

In 2012 alone, wildfires destroyed over **4,200** buildings.

This includes:

- ✓ 2,216 residences
- ✓ 1,961 outbuildings
- ✓ and 67 commercial structures

This figure is well above average and in fact is the highest number in over a decade.

There is no state, no city, nor any area at all across the United States that is immune from the devastating effects of wildfires.

The most important thing to take away from these numbers is that they are going up, not down. Dry conditions, “eco-friendly” land management practices that leave dead vegetation in place, and a lack of funds at the local level to clear up problem areas mean more fires for the foreseeable future.

That means you have a choice:

1. Watch everything you've worked your entire life for go up in smoke, or
2. Take action now to prevent it

If you choose to ignore the signs and warnings, please close this report and go on about your life. But if you want to make sure that you have done EVERYTHING in your power to provide a safe and secure home for your family, no matter what; then please, read on...

### ***Still here?***

Good.

Then let's jump right in.

In the case of a wildfire, you need to:

- Be able to protect your property as best you can
- Be able to protect your family from fire-related danger
- Know what to take with you if you need to leave your home
- Know when to head for safety

This guide will help you assess your present situation and go from wildfire novice to being completely prepared. The pages ahead have expert tips, proven fire-fighting techniques, and safety checklists to make sure you're ready for a fire if it comes. You'll finish this guide better able to protect your property, your family, and all of the possessions you've worked so hard to acquire.



## Chapter 2:

# HOW TO PROTECT YOUR PROPERTY



No one is immune from a wildfire. No matter where you live, you are a potential victim. If your default mentality is “That could never happen here” then you need to wake up. Wildfires happen in the lush, green hills of Hawaii as well as the crisp, dry plains of Texas. All it takes is a spark and something that will burn to turn “Won’t happen here” into “Oh no, it’s here!”

Flat panic is not the best way to go forward. Instead, you need to be proactive about preparing your property for the possibility of a fire. To do this, assess your risk level with a few key questions:

- How much risk is there on my property for a fire to spread?
- What direction is a wildfire likely to come from?
- Does my property have any landscape features that will burn easily?
- Are these features close to any outbuildings, sheds or my home?
- What can I do to protect my property now?
- How can I change things to lower my fire risk both around my house and on my land?

With these questions at the front of your mind, you’ll be set for taking real, meaningful action to fight off a wildfire and keep it from sweeping through and destroying everything you own.

## Before A Wildfire: The Basics

Before a fire becomes a reality, you need to look at your property with fire resistance in mind.

There are three specific elements to consider to create a defensible space. These are:

1. You'll want to construct your buildings using fire-resistant materials whenever possible, and be sure that any repairs/renovations also use fire-resistant materials.
2. You'll want to reduce the size or eliminate any natural or "public" land materials around your home that will fuel flames.
3. Try to landscape using fire resistant plants.

While there is no guarantee doing so will make your home entirely safe from a wildfire, working to meet these three points will increase your property's chance of survival. Let's look at each in-depth.

### BUILDING CONSTRUCTION AND SAFETY DEVICES

When it comes to the materials of your home, you might have had no say if the house was already built before you purchased it. However, any upgrades, repairs, additions, or new structures can include fire-fighting materials like those listed here will be under your control:

- **Roofs:** Use fire-resistant or noncombustible materials whenever possible. Alternatively, treat any combustible materials (like wood shingles) with fire-retardant chemicals. Make sure

they have been evaluated thoroughly by a recognized organization such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL).

- **Exteriors:** This includes your decks, sidings, trims and other related material. Treat them the same way you do the roof. Take special care if you have an home covered with ivy or other clinging vines—though they can be pretty, it is a fire hazard you may want to consider removing.
- **Gutters:** Keep your gutters clear of debris, especially in the fall when leaves can pile up.
- **Chimneys and fireplaces:** Inspect and clean them thoroughly every year. Make sure that if a wildfire spark entered, it wouldn't ignite anything.
- **Shutters:** Install protective, fire resistant shutters if you live in a high risk area. Inside, you may want to consider adding heavy fire-proof drapes or curtains.

Along with using fire-resistant materials, make sure you have these basic fire-safety devices in your home. They include:

- **Smoke alarms:** These should be on every level of your home. Select dual-sensors. Change the batteries regularly.
- **Fire extinguishers (ABC types):** Keep them handy, in working order, and make sure everyone in the household knows how to use them correctly. (Curious about that ABC? A is for paper, wood, and plastic fires, B covers gas and grease fires, and the C means the chemicals in your

extinguisher will handle electrical fires without blowback shocks to you)

- **Fire emergency equipment:** Axes, rakes, buckets, shovels, and hand or chain saws. These will help you fight small fires on your own and equip firefighters battling a larger blaze.
- **Ladders:** Always have one that is capable of reaching the tallest structure on your property, including the roof of your house, so that you'll be able to douse a blown spark if it comes in.

You should also consider what you put around your home. This doesn't mean your actual landscape, but the lawn and garden accessories you have out. This could be lawn chairs, other patio or lawn furniture, your BBQ grill, or your children's play set. These can all feed a fire and provide fuel for a passing blaze if you're not careful.

Replace the tarps covering vehicles in the driveway, trailers or barbecues with inflammable ones whenever possible. Keep your barbecue and its fuel tanks in a safe place. Don't leave wooden furniture pieces sitting out during wildfire season. Store them safely or buy ones constructed of fire-retardant materials.

## WILDLAND MATERIALS

Examine the land around your home. Take a close look at the areas that extend beyond your landscaping. What do you see? Are there trees, scrub brush and piles of rotting vegetation? Are the trees mainly conifers

(like pines) or deciduous (like cottonwood) or a mixture of both?

If the trees are largely conifers, you may have a problem. Pines and their evergreen relatives tend to burn more easily than deciduous trees. Cutting down the trees is one solution, but this may not be a realistic option given your HOA covenants, neighborhood aesthetics, or personal preferences. In dry times, keep them well-watered and clear away what brush or dropped needles you can. If you do cut them down, be sure to remove all their parts. Pull up the stumps as well as the roots to ensure a wildfire can't feed off them.

In tall grass or scrub brush situations, get out that mower and your weed whacker. Cut grasses off short, clear away weed bunches, and chop out dried scrub. You'll eliminate noxious weeds, lower the necessary maintenance for your outlying grounds, and starve fires of potential fuel in dry seasons.

Your end goal is to create a 30 to 100 foot safety zone around your home. If you live near or in a pine or evergreen forest, increase this buffer zone to at least 100 feet. This will cut down on the risk that sparks from a wildfire will jump to your house even if your surrounding landscape goes up in smoke.

If you live in a modern "cookie cutter" community, where that large of a safety zone isn't an option, do as much as you can with your own yard but also try to educate your neighbors about the risks of a wildfire.

Create a community wide “Fire Prevention Brigade” The more people actively involved in preventing the spread of a wild fire the better.

## DESIGNING A FIRE-RESISTANT LANDSCAPE

In order to reduce the risk of wildfires destroying your property, design a fire resistant landscape. If nothing else, creating a landscape with wildfires in mind may give you and your family some extra time to escape safely from a fast-moving fire.

Yes, neighborhood covenants or housing authority rules can be an issue. However, even if you live in an apartment building with shared landscaping, you can take action to protect your home from passing fires.

The first thing to consider is plant material. Always pick plants and other forms of vegetation with this question in mind: “Will they help to contain a fire or will they fuel it?” Talk to a professional at a garden center for ideas and suggestions about local plants that resist fire. You may also find tips online to go with these suggestions:

- **Annuals:** Most annuals are suitable if you take care of them properly and water them appropriately. If you let them get dried out and overgrown, they are a fire problem and should be replaced with less high-maintenance plants.
- **Groundcover:** You can use carpet bugleweed, creeping phlox, hens and

chicks, rock cress, snow-in-summer, or wild strawberry.

- **Perennials:** Consider chives, columbine, daylily, evening primrose, hosta, sedges, trumpet vine and/or yarrow.
- **Shrubs:** Opt for creeping holly, mock orange, Oregon boxwood, Oregon grape, pacific rhododendron, serviceberry and sumac (but be mindful of sumac allergies if anyone in your family is sensitive).

When it comes to trees, choose hardwoods whenever possible. Evergreens burn much more quickly than hardwood. The only exceptions to this rule are Ponderosa pine and Western larch. Their thick bark and the high moisture content of their leaves makes them more fire-resistant than other conifers. In general, however, pick oak trees over balsam or pine.

Besides plants and other vegetation, you have to look at your choice of decor. In many drought prone regions, landscapers use rough uncolored or dyed tree bark as a mulch to help the plants retain moisture. Bark is aesthetically pleasing. Unfortunately, it is also highly flammable.

Instead of bark, you might want to consider rocks, pebbles or stone. They come in a variety of colors. You can also add a water-recycling water feature such as a fountain or small pond to increase the fire fighting power of your landscaping. If you select the elements and combine them correctly, the overall look will be both



practical and striking.

## Creating A Buffer Zone

One of the most important things you need to do is to create a firebreak or buffer on your property. As noted previously, it should form a ring of 30 to 100 feet of low-fuel to no-fuel landscape. Now, a true firebreak is stripped earth at least three feet wide with all plants and roots removed, but these are usually something you put in as a fire approaches as an extreme move. Your buffer zone is something you can do now and maintain in all seasons as a first step in your fire defences.

Creating a buffer zone that meets the requirements of your area and matches the known wildfire risks where you live can save your property and even your life. Approach the issue logically, but when it doubt, toss visual beauty out the window in favor of practicality and safety.

The following checklist is taken from national fire safety guidelines, and will help you double check yourself as you lower the fire risk profile of your home:

- ✓ Remove all rubbish, dead leaves, and other forms of built-up vegetation from under your home, shed, and other structures
- ✓ Inside the designated area, make sure all trees are free of dead limbs.
- ✓ If your landscape features dead perennials, annuals, or any flammable vegetation, remove it without mercy.
- ✓ Thin your tree tops. Make sure the crowns do not touch and there are no limbs on the first 15' up from the ground level so that each tree is less likely to catch fire or pass fire to its neighbor.
- ✓ Cut back any tree limbs that extend over the roofs of any of your buildings or other structures.
- ✓ Make sure no branches overhang your chimney.
- ✓ If you have creeping vines on your home, remove them.
- ✓ Remove any flammable fuels from inside your firebreak. Make sure if you have outside barbecues and/or propane tanks that you clear at least a 10' area around them.
- ✓ The same applies to gasoline and any fuel-soaked materials. Store them only in approved fireproof containers away from your home.
- ✓ If you have an outside grill, cover it with a non-flammable mesh screen.
- ✓ Never leave newspapers or other highly flammable recyclables laying around—dispose of them regularly, especially in peak fire season for your area.
- ✓ If you use firewood, do not stack it up beside your home or out buildings. Make sure it sits in a cleared area approximately 20' away from the nearest structure.

When you are working on your fire free

zone, be sure you include any outbuildings, barns, or sheds you don't want to see go up in smoke.

## Other Helpful Things

To protect your property, you need to consider a wide variety of factors. Some are as simple as purchasing tools. Some are ongoing issues and others are seasonal.

### SEASONAL MATTERS

If you live in a high-risk area, know your seasonal variations and how to monitor fire break outs and alerts. Make sure you monitor the changing risk levels frequently. Be ready to go into action and review your emergency plans when wildfire risk is high.

### DOCUMENTATION AND OTHER PAPER WORK

Since the risk of property damage is high, be sure you have a complete record of your home and its contents. Video your house, and even certain contents, using a camcorder or your phone. Also, be certain to prepare a list of your valuable items, updating it regularly as you make new purchases.

Make sure these items are kept where fire cannot destroy them. Online records are inherently fire safe, but to be on the safe side, make physical copies, too. You can store them with a friend, a family member or a lawyer for safekeeping.

Above all, take out and keep current a solid homeowner's insurance policy. Choose the best you can afford and opt for replacement

cost coverage instead of actual cash value. It costs more upfront, but will help you rebuild a solid, comfortable home after a fire as opposed to getting a minimal cash settlement based on the insurance company's assessment of your old home's worth.

## CONCLUSION

When it comes to wildfires, everyone is at risk. The level of risk will vary from state to state and region to region, so take the time to learn what's normal and likely for your area.

Remember, to create a fire-resistant property you need to follow three crucial steps:

- ✓ Use fire-resistant building materials
- ✓ Reduce anything that will fuel a fire in the wild land around your home
- ✓ Choose fire-resistant plants and decorations in your home's landscape.

By following these steps, you will decrease the overall risk of fire destroying your home. You can get started right now—even if you've never prepared for a wildfire in the past—and be ahead of the pack by the time the next wildfire threatens your area.

## Chapter 3:

# PROTECT YOUR FAMILY

A dramatic photograph showing the silhouettes of a family—a man, a woman, and a child—standing in the foreground, looking towards a large, intense wildfire at night. The fire is bright orange and yellow, contrasting sharply with the dark blue and black night sky. The scene is backlit by the fire, creating a somber and urgent atmosphere.

Protecting your family is the most important goal of all. In times of disaster, you want to be sure everyone survives. In the case of a wildfire, this makes it doubly important that everyone be prepared.

### **First Things First**

It is not enough for you to draw up an evacuation plan. You and your family need to be on the same page. Everyone needs to know what you are doing and why.

This is not to be touchy-feely about the situation. By making sure your whole family is on the same page for fire safety and potential evacuation, everyone can feel like they are a part of the plan and you can eliminate risk from clueless kids or confused spouses.

Involving your whole family in the planning can also help plug holes in your plan. Each member of the family will have their own concerns to bring forward and these may show you a better solution than your original proposal or stop you from forgetting to plan for something critical (like bringing along essential medications or the family pet).

### **The Fire Evacuation Plan**

To draw up a fire plan, check with local resources about high-risk seasons and potential

evacuation routes. Know where local emergency shelters are—including ones that take pets. Understanding what the official networks will be doing will help you take advantage of the resources they offer as you make your own plans.

## INITIAL STEPS

Once you have done your early research, prepare a plan. Be sure to have more than one conversation with your family and write down the details of your plan. Consider practice drills in high risk seasons.

Your plan should include:

- A map of the house showing all the possible exits as well as clearly marked best exits
- The location of your firefighting equipment such as extinguishers, axes, water hoses and buckets.
- The place to meet if everyone is home when a fire comes through
- A place to meet as well as a contact number to call if people are separated when it's time to evacuate
- An alternative meeting place in case something happens to the initial safe place
- Information about who to call if parents are at work, kids are at school or the dog is in doggy daycare when a fire comes
- An assignment page noting who is in charge of what.

For example, you may be in charge of getting

the car loaded. An older child may handle placing your pets one room while another child stays with them to keep them calm. This makes it easier to know where everyone is and spreads out the responsibility. It also makes the plan inclusive with everyone feeling they are part of the solution while the wildfire is the problem.

## NEXT STAGE

Having an evacuation plan is only part of your preparation. You will need to plan and prepare to spend time away from home. This will be covered in depth in later sections, but it's important to consider that you may not be able to return home right away in your initial plans.

When you leave your home, you may not know when you will be allowed to come back. You'll need to cover having relevant ID and other paperwork to deal with aid agencies if they're a part of your plan, meds or care plans to cover medical issues, and reliable supplies of food and water. To this end, you will need to:

- Put together emergency kits—often called bug-out bags—loaded with what you'll need to thrive away from home. Make one for each member of the family—including the four-legged members.
- Keep copies of all valuable documents—from insurance form to birth certificates, personal ID, marriage and driver's licenses, passports, bank account numbers and other valuable papers—in a safe place. A safety-deposit box

or other fire-retardant container are one choice, or you can store copies with close friends or family members who live outside your region.

- Stock up on food and water. While a 72 hour supply should be in your bug out bag, you may also want to have additional food stores and water caches in case you end up on your own for several days or even several weeks. Plan for any special dietary needs up front for your own peace of mind and later security.
- Make a specialty kit with unique items to care for your family's specific needs. This may contain items such as prescriptions (actual and the paper form) specialty items for seniors, and toys, diapers, or formula for the very young

### **IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN**

To successfully put your family's wildfire safety plan into action, make sure everyone knows what to do and when. Go over your meeting place and meeting systems. Cover off on pets, locating separated family members, and getting valuables secure. Have a system that incorporates modern technology with a fall back plan if phone lines or the internet is down.

Once you create the fire evacuation plan, keep it updated. Go through your entire plan twice each year at the beginning and end of fire season. This will help you practice what you've set up and adapt to new trends

or changes each season, such as damage to meeting spots, new additions to the family, or changes to your home.

Even if your teenagers roll their eyes, run the whole family through the drill. Have everyone hit the exits and meet at the designated spot outside the home. Practice loading your car in 10 minutes and hiding valuables if those things are in your plan. The more you do it, the more comfortable it will seem and the faster you can fix any kinks in your planning. This will help everyone be ready physically and psychologically for the real thing.

### **ODDS AND ENDS**

You can also help ensure your family's protection in other ways. Encourage all members to take courses relating to fire safety if they're offered in your community. You should also make sure everyone knows how to correctly operate your fire extinguisher and outdoor water hoses.

Other things to consider as you prepare your family for a wildfire is the location of the utilities. Everyone, including children, should know where the shut-off valves are for the water, power and gas. For kids, let them see how they can turn them off—stressing they should do so only in the case of an emergency such as a wildfire.

Yet, even with the plan in place, there is the chance you may run into problems. What happens if you can't leave? What happens if you manage to leave but fire overtakes your

car? What if you need to flee on foot and a wildfire strikes while you are out in the open?

## **Trapped At Home**

If you find you cannot leave your home, stay calm. Panic is your worst enemy at this time. Stop and assess the situation. Begin by prioritizing your and your family's needs.

### **FIREBREAK**

If you can, reinforce your firebreak. Identify a vulnerable area near your home. Taking as many people and tools as is possible, begin to clear it thoroughly. The section needs to be at least 3' wide for it to be effective.

Be methodical. Rip out all vegetation and remove any flammables. This includes the roots. Work until the area is clear. Keep watch and be ready to leave when necessary.

### **WATER**

If your firebreak is already sufficient, turn your attention to other fire retardant measures. Take a hose and wet down any exposed and potentially flammable areas. This includes the roof of your home as well as the top of any outbuildings. Hose down fences, trellises and any other wooden structures and outdoor décor.

If you have a pond or swimming pool, fill it with water. The same applies to hot tubs or even garbage cans. This may help slow down the advance of the wildfire.

### **INSIDE**

Inside your home, you can employ a number of tactics to help keep your family safe. Cover

any vents and close your windows. If you have fire repellent shutter close them. Locate all other openings and cover them with flame retardant plywood or duct tape them tight.

To protect your home and everyone in it, you need to make sure to shut off all natural gas, oil, and propane fuel lines. You also have to move anything and everything combustible away from the windows. This includes drapes, furniture, knick-knacks, etc. The family should also stay away from the windows.

People need to be alert in case a spark lands inside the house. Place family members to watch vulnerable spots such as the chimney. Make sure the pets are confined to one room. Place someone inside with them to ensure their safety and to prevent them from panicking.

Be sure the fire department knows the situation and the location of your home. Keep in contact with them so you, and they, can be quickly made aware of any changes—positive or negative. Being on top of the state of affairs will help you survive.

Finally, to protect your valuable papers and photos if you don't have a fire-proof safe, fill your bathtubs. Place the papers in two layers of quick seal plastic bags (like Ziploc freezer bags), squeeze out the air as you seal them up, and submerge the bags in the water. This protects them from errant sparks, smoke damage, and heat combustion.

Above all, don't panic. Fire fighters have many stories of people surviving in their

homes even when fire destroyed everything around them because they proactively protected themselves in their present location instead of running out in a panic into a wildfire on the move.

## **Ambushed In Your Vehicle**

The potential exists for you and your family to become trapped in your car as you attempt to evacuate. Wildfires can move very quickly and jump to new areas unexpectedly, blocking your path.

If this occurs, follow these directions from the National Fire Service:

- Roll up all car windows tightly
- Close every car vent
- If you can continue to drive, proceed slowly
- Never drive through thick smoke. You do not know where it will lead you
- If you have to stop, do not park near any vegetation, growth or items that will catch fire
- Turn the engine off BUT leave the headlights on so you are visible. This will act as a signal to firefighters, police and other motorists, identifying the position of your vehicle
- If it becomes necessary, lie close to or actually on the floor of the vehicle
- Cover yourself with clothing, a blanket or any other type of preferably flame retardant covering

- Remain in your vehicle until help arrives or the wildfire moves on

Above all, if you find yourself trapped in your car, remain calm. It's not an ideal situation by any means, but panic will make things worse. Deal with the deck you've been dealt and try to make the best of your situation whether you are forced to stay in your home, trapped in your vehicle or caught out in the open.

## **Caught In The Open**

If, when fleeing a fire on foot, you and your family are caught in the open, remain calm. Failure to do so can result in tragic consequences. You must remain in control at all times and think carefully about what to do.

The first thing you need to do is remove your bug-out or emergency kits if you have any. Take out anything flammable—particularly fuel. If you are wearing anything synthetic, it is best to remove that as well. Unless the fabric is specifically designed to be fire proof or fire resistant, synthetic fibers will more than likely melt instead of burn. While you may end up stripped down to your skivvies, it is much better than the alternative of being covered in a toxic plastic ooze.

If you have a blanket, coat or fabric made of dry cotton or wool, wrap it around yourself. You can also pour any emergency water you have on your clothing and blanket. Let the material soak it up. This will help you if you have to remain where you are or if you need to walk through the flames.

If you can, try to walk around the wildfire. If this is not possible, you will need to go to ground.

### GOING TO GROUND

If you have no option, make a stand. Find the area with the least amount of vegetative growth. The less green there is, the less fuel there is for the fire. Avoid any valley, gully or canyon. These are all a death trap in a wildfire.

After picking your spot and making sure every member has one, lie face down. Cover any exposed body parts—particularly your neck and face, with dirt, clothing or a blanket. If the blanket or material is wet, all the better. This will help deter the wildfire.

Once in place, lie still. Do not move or disturb your protective covering.

### THROUGH THE FIRE

If you can, walk around or through a gap in the fire. Make sure, first, that this will not put you and your family in a more dangerous situation. Look and see if a burnt patch or fire free area lies beyond the burning flames. If going beyond the fire by going through is the option, go for it. Just take precautions.

Wrap yourself as much as possible in a blanket or clothing. Make sure, if you have a supply of water, to wet down your hair. Walk quickly, not stopping. The hope is that by moving quickly you will not catch fire.

If flames or sparks land on your clothing, once you reach a safe spot, stop, drop and roll. Even if you're relatively sure you

made it through without catching fire, it doesn't hurt to stop, drop, and roll anyway. Alternatively, smother the flames out with a blanket or other material, giving yourself a thorough pat down to ensure there are no smoldering embers in cuffs or collars.

### FINAL THOUGHT

If you are caught in a wildfire, you will have to think and act quickly. Do not hesitate. Decide where to go. Act quickly and either dash through the flames to a more secure spot or hunker down until it passes.

Keep in mind that wildfires are unpredictable. They are affected by the pattern of vegetative growth. They also are dependent upon the wind pattern. Be alert and aware of both aspects before you make your decision to stay or go through the flames.

## CONCLUSION

Do not neglect any aspect of your fire plan. It should try to cover all eventualities. You and your family must all know well ahead of the event what to do if:

- ✓ You have to evacuate
- ✓ If only a few of you are at home
- ✓ If you cannot leave home
- ✓ If you are stuck in a vehicle
- ✓ If you are out in the open



## Chapter 4:

# MORE ADVANCED PREPARATION



The Spanish author, Miguel de Cervantes, once wrote, “Forewarned, forearmed; to be prepared is half the victory.” Although written in the 16th century, it is as apt today as it was then. In today’s world, being prepared for a wildfire will save you and your family’s lives. One essential item you will need is the “bug-out” bag.

### **The Bug-Out Bag**

A bug-out kit is a 48 to 72-hour kit. In other words, it is a disaster supplies kit. As such, it must contain enough items and supplies to get you through the next 24 to 72 hours. These kits can be elaborate or simple. You will need to decide on what to put into them. You also have to prepare one for each member of the family, including any pets who will be bugging out with you.

Essentially, there are two specific types of bug-out kits: One that is general in nature with items the entire family can utilize and one that is person-specific. In the latter case, a bug-out kit will contain basic items you and each family member will need during an emergency event such as a wildfire.

### **FAMILY EMERGENCY KIT**

A 3-day general emergency kit should contain the following items:

- ✓ Water
- ✓ Battery and hand-cranked radio
- ✓ Battery operated and/or hand-cranked flashlight
- ✓ Extra batteries
- ✓ A first aid kit
- ✓ Wooden matches in a waterproof container and fire starter
- ✓ Non-perishable food
- ✓ Whistle/signal for help
- ✓ Overall documents for the entire family
- ✓ Cash, coins
- ✓ Small sewing kit
- ✓ Space blanket
- ✓ Cash
- ✓ Small LED flashlight
- ✓ Any prescription medications
- ✓ Space blanket
- ✓ Trail mix, energy bars and other small portable nutritional items
- ✓ Water
- ✓ Wooden matches in a waterproof container
- ✓ Id and personal papers (copies)
- ✓ Antiseptic hand wash, toilet paper or tissues

These items can be separated into smaller bundles and shared among family members, but they can also be placed in a large satchel into the trunk of the car. If you have enough time and space, you could consider adding extra food, a portable and/or folding cook stove, or similar comfort and convenience items.

### **PERSONAL EMERGENCY KIT**

Be sure everyone knows what they need to pack. Each family member needs to sit down and say what they want to bring and why. They should then pack the items into the kit and place it in a safe place.

- ✓ Change of clothes—seasonal

### **PET EMERGENCY KIT**

In addition to these kits, there is the Pet Emergency Kit. It consists of a supply of food, the dog's, cat's, or bird's favorite toys, a blanket, a carrier of some sort and enough food, water and treats. If your pet is on medication or a special supplement, include it. Also, be sure to provide copies of the animal's ID and veterinarian records. You should also list contact numbers, your own cell and home phone number, the Vet's number and any allergies or dietary or psychological peculiarities.

### **OTHER EMERGENCY KITS**

If your car is a part of your bug out plans, you can prepare a car kit. This can be substantially larger than your average emergency or personal kit. A car kit will come in handy if you have to stay away from home for a longer time.

The average car or vehicle kit contains:

- ✓ Clothing
- ✓ Blankets
- ✓ Cook set – pots and pans
- ✓ Cook stove and fuel
- ✓ Drinking water
- ✓ Flares
- ✓ Flashlight
- ✓ Food—including Meals Ready to Eat (MRE) or freeze dried food rations
- ✓ Local road map
- ✓ Shovel
- ✓ Tarp
- ✓ Toilet Paper
- ✓ Tools

## FINAL WORD ON KITS

Remember, except for the extended car kit, your kits must be lightweight in case you have to carry them some distance. Make sure you and all members of the household can carry their pack. Practice doing so—and if you're working with kids, the practice carry can help you know what's appropriate for them to carry and help them understand why they can't take every single toy or gadget they own. Integrate it into your fire evacuation procedure.

Remember, these kits are made months in advance of a potential wildfire. Check them

annually to ensure the contents are good. Test the flashlight, for example, to make sure it is working. You will find it necessary to replace some items over time.

## Documents, ID and Personal Photographs

Memories, family history and important documents. These all help shape us. They also identify us to the authorities. In case of a wildfire, you can preserve your heritage and identity well in advance and make sure you have the right ID with you to use government resources as needed.

### KEEPING DOCUMENTS AND ID SAFE

In this modern world, everybody has a paper trail. You have birth and divorce certificates, marriage and driver's licenses, bank accounts and insurance policies of all types. You keep them in hard copy and on your computers. You use them online as well as in person.

It is very important not to keep this information too close in the event of a fire. Even if you have them, you should not keep the originals in your home. Perhaps you do have fireproof storage on site. However, it is still better to store them in a safe place away from the fire risk. Alternatively, place them in a fireproof safe deposit box in a bank or post office.

For added safety, have more than one copy

of key documents. You can send them to a relative, friend, or lawyer to guard for you. You should also keep a copy in your personal emergency kit.

Your family members should also carry pertinent copies in their personal kits. Everyone should have a copy of his or her important ID information. This includes Social Security card, health card, driver's and/or marriage license, birth certificate and/or passport. You should also keep copies of any medical prescriptions and conditions on hand, sending copies with the appropriate individuals.

The pet also needs to have his or her identification in their kit. You can attach it to their collar or carrier case. Make sure even if the animal is wearing ID and shot tags, there are extras in the emergency kit and attached to the carrier. This way, there is less chance of losing the documents.

## **PICTURES AND PHOTOS**

Pictures and photos are also other items you can ensure are safe from flames long in advance. You can preserve them by storing the originals in a secure, fireproof container in your home or at a bank. Today, there are also other means. Digitalize them.

External hard drives are a very portable option, and a good way to maintain a local copy of photo you can also store online in cloud storage. This way, you'll have photos to

carry with you and photos that are safe from both fire and water damage in an emergency.

## **CONCLUSION**

Advanced preparation is important. It cuts down on time if you are physically ready to leave on a moment's notice and have your bug out bag packed.

Check your bug out bags at least once a year to see if anything requires replacement or if you need to update the contents. Be sure everyone's bag is light enough for them to carry on their own. Put bulkier items in a car kit as needed.

When it comes to documents, everyone needs to carry a copy. Keep the originals stored away in a safe, fire resistant place. Send copies to trusted friends and non-local contacts. Upload scans and originals of photos to cloud storage and duplicate them on external hard drives for easy mobility.

This is all preparation work. You can do it months and even years in advance. However, like bug out bags, be sure to update all information as it changes. Keeping it current and accurate will help you when you need to use this information.

## Chapter 5:

# KNOW WHAT TO DO AND WHAT TO TAKE WHEN YOU LEAVE

When it finally comes time to leave, you need to be ready. Far in advance, prepare a list of what you and your family need to take with you. Some, as noted above, are obvious. They are part of your long term planning. There are other things, you may not have thought about but need to do now.

### **Process**

Take your master list and prepare to check everything off. Your list should include what to take with you and what to do with your house as you leave it. What you have time to do will depend upon the proximity of the fire.

### **BEFORE LEAVING**

As soon as you hear the order to withdraw or decide on your own to head out, have everyone meet together. Make sure they are ready to play their part and that evacuation plans are in motion. Are the family pets confined to one room? Is each person fulfilling his or her role? Is everything under control with no one panicking?

### **FINAL WALK THROUGH**

If you can, do a quick walk through of the house and

- ✓ Make sure the windows are all closed and locked
- ✓ Shut off the power, gas and water

- ✓ Lock your doors—including garage and shed doors.
- ✓ See that your animals are ready, their carriers waiting to be picked up and placed in the car or other vehicle for departure

## What To Take

When it comes time to leave, make sure you have the following:

- ✓ Car and house keys
- ✓ The bug out or emergency supplies kits—personal and family size
- ✓ A first aid kit
- ✓ Radio, flashlight and batteries for both
- ✓ Map of the local area
- ✓ List of shelters – pet friendly or not
- ✓ Extra bottled water
- ✓ Extra clothing and bedding
- ✓ Any special needs items for children and/or the elderly
- ✓ The pets with their kits including carrier, food and water
- ✓ A signal to call for help
- ✓ Your cell phone and its charger
- ✓ Any personal sanitation and hygiene materials
- ✓ Cash and coins
- ✓ Descriptions of each member of the family
- ✓ Medical conditions of each member
- ✓ Contact numbers for vets, family physician and specialists
- ✓ Originals and copies of personal identity

documents (mainly, your driver's license). You will need these to claim government fire benefits at shelters as well as to access health services in a crisis.

- ✓ Insurance paperwork. You want to be first in line to get benefits if anything happens, and that's a lot easier when you have your documents.
- ✓ Bank account numbers, documents, etc.
- ✓ Contact numbers

## CONCLUSION

What you do before you leave depends upon two things: How prepared you are and how much time you have.

These two factors will govern whether you get out with nothing or escape with sufficient items to keep you and your family comfortable while away from home.

If you prepare in advance, you will be able to recover more quickly. You will not only have enough to see you through this rough time, but sufficient documents to make it easier for you to get shelter, process an insurance claim and deal with other government bureaucracy resources that will be around when a fire sweep through.

In case any of your personal documents don't make it out with you, replacements can be ordered through:

<http://www.usa.gov/Citizen/Topics/Family-Issues/Vital-Docs.shtml>

## Chapter 6:

# KNOW WHEN TO HEAD OUT



If a wildfire is known to be in the area, you have a choice. “Should I stay or should I go?” Deciding one way or the other dictates your next options.

### Pros And Cons

There are arguments to support either position.

- ✓ Stay and you risk a fire, but you also keep your property safe from looters and vagrants who may be moving through at-risk communities looking for easy pickings.
- ✓ Leave to stay safe and you may miss a big disaster, or you may be heading out in paranoia, putting your family through unnecessary discomfort.

It will be up to you and your family to decide what’s best under the circumstances.

### LEAVING EARLY

If you leave early, you can take your time. You can pack your car with greater leisure and escape with everything you want to your first choice location, or have your pick of available shelters from aid agencies. It will give you time to settle yourself and your pets. Leaving early may also reduce the sense of panic that can come with a hurried departure.

Yet, if you leave too early, you may use up the valuable resources in your emergency kit. It

will also make you dependent upon shelters and your savings, depleting your personal resources unnecessarily. Extended time away from your home can also put it at risk for days before a fire arrives.

The key to knowing when to leave so that you can be gone before gridlock and panic set in is not waiting until the official word comes through to run for safety. With everyone getting the message at the same time, it creates panic. For a prepared family, leaving beforehand will ensure a smoother departure and the pick of shelters and resources.

### **LEAVING LATER**

Leaving later may be beneficial if official evacuation orders go out quite early or if the wildfire shifts away from your property. However, leaving at the last minute is all in all not a good plan as you can risk being stuck in your home or on the road with a wildfire. Escape routes can be blocked, or gridlock can make getting out impossible.

Overall, it is far better to err on the side of caution. Leaving early will guarantee you and your family, including many of your valuables, are safe.

### **How To Make The Decision**

How to make the decision relies on your ability to receive and filter through the information coming from a variety of sources. These include local fire agencies, television and radio broadcasts and even internet

updates. Know how key fire messages will be broadcast in your area. It is also essential to know how much time you have once an evacuation order is given.

Monitor the sources. Listen carefully to what they are saying. Make sure everyone is prepared to bug-out as soon as you and/or the authorities make the call. Have your car packed and all emergency kits ready in advance. Make sure the pets are confined in a single room until you are ready to load them up and leave.

When you decide to leave, do so without hesitation. If the authorities tell you to leave, check corroborating sources and then head out immediately to your best choice destination. Do not wait around.

## **CONCLUSION**

When it comes time to leave, don't hesitate. Put into action your emergency plan. Pay attention to the authorities and make sure everyone is all set to go.

While some problems may result from leaving too early, leaving early is better than leaving too late. When you hesitate and stall, you may put your entire family in jeopardy. It is a far better thing to leave early than to lose what is truly important—your family.



## Chapter 7:

# AVOID CAUSING A WILDFIRE



As a final note, when it comes to wildfire protection measures, the best ones are preventative. As Smokey the Bear says, “Only you can prevent forest fires.” This is as apt now as when it was introduced in the 1950s. It is not only important you prepare yourself in case of a wildfire. It is just as important (maybe even more so) that you do all you can to prevent being the cause of one.

### Memorable Wildfires And Their Causes

While it is impossible to stop lightening from striking or prevent leaves from combustion, you can avoid these memorable and disastrous mistakes from the last 10 years.

**2003:** Second largest fire in the State of California ripped through Sand Diego County. The Cedar Fire burnt 280,000 acres, destroyed 2,232 homes and left 14 dead. The fire started in the campsite of a hunter trying to ignite his camp fire with dried shrubs.

**2004:** In 2004, William Matthew Rupp of Jones Valley, CA, caused a massive wildfire when he used his lawnmower during a drought. The lawnmower struck a rock creating a spark that ignited the dry grass of his lawn. The result was the loss of 11,000 acres and 88 homes. Rupp had been warned by his neighbors not to mow the lawn that day.

**2007:** Southern California was undergoing a prolonged drought. The brush covering the hills was as dry as tinder. A brush wildfire consumed the hills causing the evacuation of more than 500

homes. The rapid flames ate up approximately three square miles. The cause of the wildfire was believed to be a vehicle fire.

**2011:** The Hula Hut on Lake Austin, Texas, caught fire after a nearby business set off fireworks on New Year's Eve. The sparks from this professionally conducted display landed on the deck and ignited. Fortunately, the professional fireworks company had included firefighters as part of their display. The fire was quickly put out. This prevented what could have quickly become a wildfire from engulfing other structures nearby.

**2012:** Cle Clum, Washington was the site of a massive wildfire. It scorched 22,600 acres, and caused the evacuation of many homes. Construction on nearby Taylor Bridge was the origin of the wildfire. The welding and cutting practices of the construction company had ignored state regulations. In spite of the dry conditions, the company continued to work using this equipment past the specified crucial time of 1pm. When the fire broke out, the company did not have experienced personnel present to work the pump. The fire spread rapidly, engulfing the region behind and beyond the Taylor Bridge.

## **Basic Causes Of Wildfires**

While lightning remains a major cause of fires, individuals continue to cause them inadvertently. The Texas A & M Fire Service lists the following potential "dumb human"

causes of wildfires:

- Campfires
- Sparks from welding and grinding equipment
- Recklessly discarded smoking items e.g. butts, matches
- Hot vehicle pollution control equipment
- Arson
- Fireworks
- Broken glass—catches the sun's rays acting as a magnifying glass

One of the most common human-based causes of wildfires is the careless burning of debris. This may consist of household trash, brush and leaf piles, garden spots, etc. Fortunately, while you cannot stop lightning from striking, you can prevent many of these types of wildfires.

## **How To Prevent Wildfires**

To prevent a fire occurring because of your actions requires nothing more than basic common sense. It also helps if you know what you are doing. This does not simply refer to the actual practices. It also indicates your need to talk to the appropriate authorities as well as other informed individuals. Towards this end, it is always an excellent idea to:

- ✓ Contact your local fire department, health department, or forestry office

for information on fire laws. Discover whether you can do a controlled burn-off and, if so, when.

- ✓ Talk to your neighbors about wildfire safety. You can learn from them the prevalence of wildfires in your area or neighborhood. They can help you create a viable plan to handle a wildfire.

Getting to know your neighbors is also a wonderful way to discover how the entire neighborhood could work together to help each other prepare for and recover after a wildfire. Everyone can make a list of his or her own skills and special talents. One may be a physician and another could be a metalworker.

Together you can come up with plans to help those who have special needs such as elderly or disabled persons. You can also come up with plans to take care of children who may be on their own if parents can't get home.

### **FIRE SAFETY BEGINS AT HOME**

It is important that you and your children learn and practice fire safety. This means using basic sense when dealing with matches, not leaving candles unattended, and not putting anything flammable close to a lit stove or fire. Around a campfire, no tossing in flammable substances as a clean-up technique. It goes without saying that some things like fireworks just shouldn't be thrown in a fire for fun, like fireworks. What seems funny one moment is a wildfire the next, and

an entirely preventable disaster.

Ensure that your kids understand the seriousness of the potential problem, and be sure they take part in planning your emergency response system. Talk about the several escape routes in your house as well as those between your home and a designated safe place. Make sure they know the options available and what to do if they have to leave by foot, are at home alone or away in school.

Talk to them about what they need to do if they must stay home during a wildfire. Explain the best approach to take if they are caught on foot or trapped in a vehicle. Don't simply talk to them about it—demonstrate it. Use videos (many are available on various internet sites including YouTube).

On your part, make sure there is easy fire vehicle access to your home and property. You can build a firebreak and landscape with a wildfire in mind. Be alert and always, always, report hazardous conditions that could cause a wildfire.

### **FOLLOW LOCAL BURNING LAWS**

When it comes to accidentally causing a fire, burning trash or undertaking a burn-off are potential recipes for a disaster. To avoid having a practical fire turn into a runaway wildfire, consider the following:

- Before burning debris in a wooded area, make sure you notify local authorities and obtain a burning permit. If you are

in the midst of drought conditions, do not burn at all.

- When you burn material, don't burn it in the open. Use burn barrels or locally approved incinerator with a safety lid or covering with holes no larger than  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch.
- Create at least a 10-foot clearing around the incinerator before burning debris.
- Always have a fire extinguisher or garden hose on hand when burning debris.

## CAMPFIRES

Having a campfire or bonfire can be great fun for friends, family, or neighborhood parties. Yet, you need to follow certain fire safety rules if you want the fire to remain friendly and not turn into a raging wildfire.

- If you are having a campfire or barbecue, take care to keep control of the flames.
- Burn it only in a constructed fireplace or in a trench at least a foot deep.
- Make sure the area around the fire pit, barbecue or trench is clear of any flammable equipment
- Never build it close to anything potentially risky such as a clothesline tree or loose branches
- Make sure everyone—both adults and children—knows how to act around a fire

- Always watch pets around a fire. It may be a good idea to keep long tailed dogs and fires apart.
- Never toss fireworks into a fire.
- Never use gasoline or any other fuel to act as an accelerant—there are safer fire starters for dry seasons!

It is possible to have a good time around a campfire with your family, friends and neighbors without it turning into a fiery fiasco. All it takes is following a few simple rules.

## CONCLUSION

Around 1,800 outdoor fires occur across the United States every day. Some are small trash fires, while others are large brush fires that threaten homes and safety. Most are accidental and preventable.

You can do your part by following the guideline established by your local fire agencies, listening to the levels of risk during the year and by teaching your family the basics of fire safety. Everyone should know what to do in case of fire. They should also know what to do to prevent a fire from happening.

# CONCLUSION

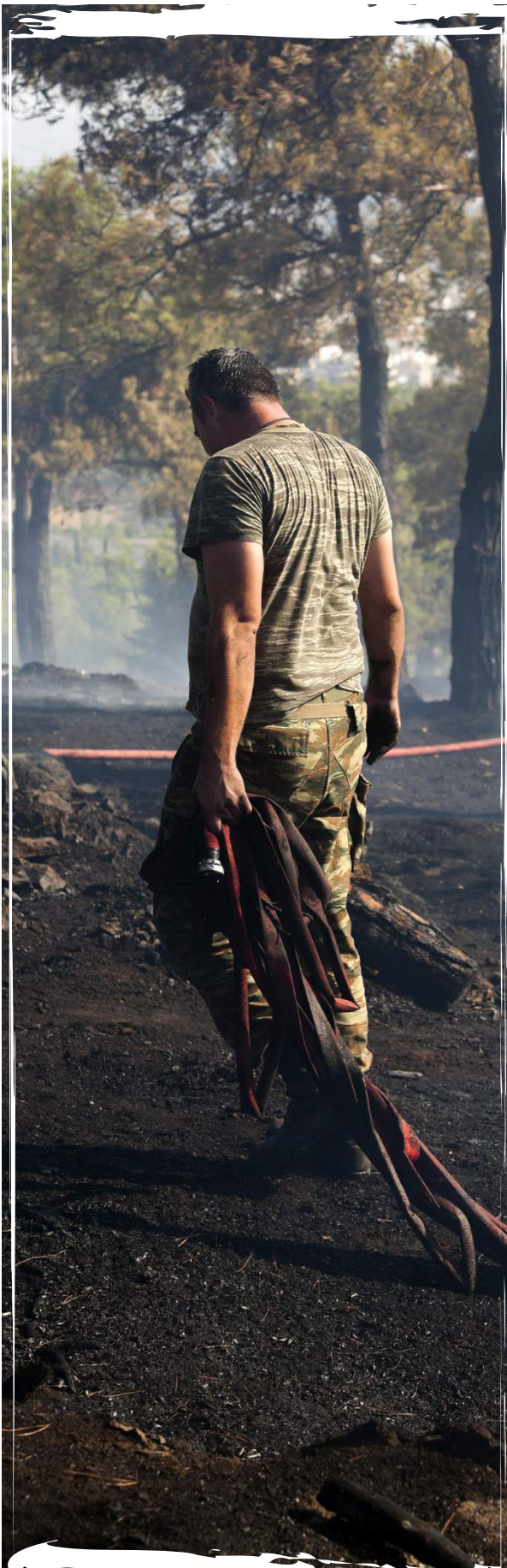
Each year, millions of acres of land are scorched and burnt to the ground by ravaging wildfires and the truth is, there is nothing that you or I can do to put a stop to it. Wild fires are a necessary, vital, and overall beneficial part of nature and nature is without mercy.

The harsh reality is that human invasion of forestlands combined with prolonged drought conditions and a lack of public land maintenance funds create the perfect storm for wildfires. All it takes is one lightning bolt; A single cigarette butt dropped in dry grass; A controlled burn that gets away when the wind turns or a mower blade that strikes a rock and ignites a dry lawn. Any one of these small actions is all it takes to birth a raging, out of control fire.

While the level of risk varies seasonally and from state-to-state, it remains important for everyone to know what to do when a wildfire threaten. To protect your property and your family, you have to prepare.

**Step 1** is to create a fire-resistant property. You must:

- ✓ Use fire-resistant building materials
- ✓ Reduce anything that will fuel a fire in the wild land around your home
- ✓ Employ only fire-resistant plant material in your home's landscape



**Step 2** is to prepare and implement a functional and specific emergency plan. To do so you must:

- ✓ Map your escape route and all possible emergency exits
- ✓ Have everybody put together a basic bug-out kit, with special kits for pets and children. Add a car kit where it's feasible for you.
- ✓ Make sure everyone has a role during a wildfire crisis and understands it
- ✓ Practice emergency procedures including what to do if trapped at home, at school, in the open or in the car

The best defense against a wildfire is a good offense. This includes actively preventing wildfires from happening as well as ensuring that you aren't the cause of one. Whenever you pull out a match to light a candle or a campfire, remember Smokey the Bear's motto: "Only you can prevent forest fires."

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For more useful information on fire safety and disaster survival methods visit [www.Survival-Life.com](http://www.Survival-Life.com) To connect with other preparedness minded individuals and receive timely survival reports like this each month, join Survival Life's Lamplighter Society.

And remember:

**"We're All In This Together"**



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