

Surviving a Wildfire in Arizona



Are You Prepared?

UNDERSTANDING WILDFIRE

AN EMBER TO REMEMBER

Most fires start small – a match, a cigarette, a spark. And most fires stay small. They just burn a little patch of grass, and then fizzle out. However, there is one thing that can change a fizzle into an inferno: W I N D. Are you prepared for what can happen when a fizzle meets a breeze? Picture this.



That little tiny fire burns a little patch of grass. But a breeze comes along and pushes the fire for a couple of feet to the edge of a clump of brush.

The brush quickly bursts into flame. The tall flames above the brush are bent by the wind and ignite a nearby tree.

Now spreading through the grass, brush and drought stressed trees, the fire grows to the size of a football field in less than 10 minutes. The bigger it gets, the faster it grows.

The flames are now taller than your house. Pushed by the wind, the flaming front of the fire is moving faster than you can walk.



ALL FIRES START SMALL. ALL FIRES GO OUT. WHAT MATTERS IS WHAT HAPPENS IN BETWEEN.

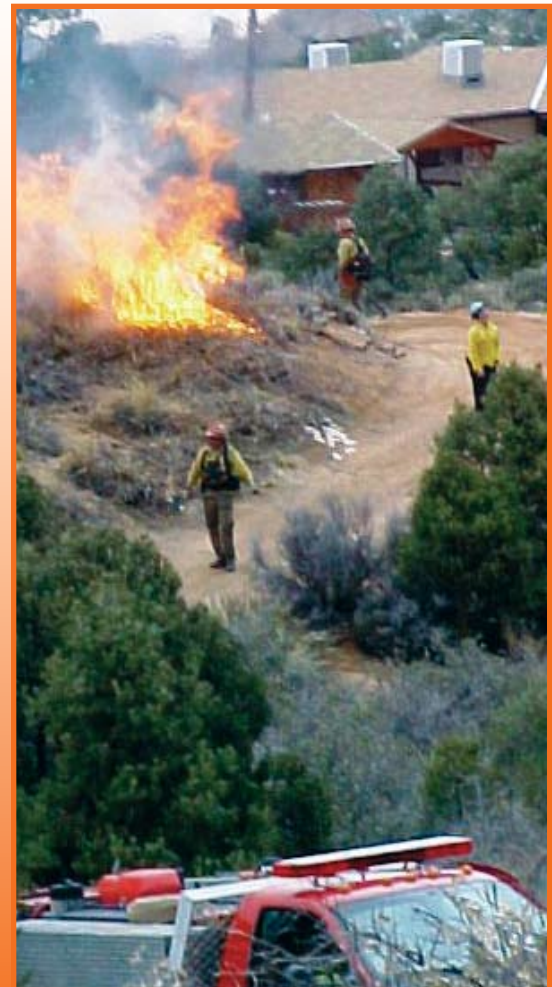
- The wind throws embers one mile or more ahead of the flames. These embers start new fires.
- As the main fire approaches your house, strong winds blow embers everywhere possible – under decks, against wood fences, into wood piles, and through open doors and windows. Embers blown onto the roof come to rest in thick piles of dry leaves.



Willow Fire near Payson, Arizona in 2004.

**THIS BOOKLET IS FULL OF SUGGESTIONS TO
HELP YOU PLAN AHEAD AND MAKE THE RIGHT
DECISIONS WHEN SMOKE FILLS THE AIR.**

- In some places the air is so smoky that you can't see more than 10 feet.
- Close to where the fire is burning most intensely, the air is far too hot to breathe.
- The rising smoke and ash create winds on the ground cause all the fires to burn even more intensely.
- Fires like this occur every year. Fires don't just happen in the summer, in many areas of Arizona fires can happen year round.
- One of Arizona's largest wildfires, the Rodeo-Chedeski Fire, near Show Low in 2002, burned 486,000 acres, more than 450 homes, cost nearly \$22 million to fight and caused \$329 million in damages.
- When it is dry and windy be watchful and be prepared to take action to protect your family and property.



Firefighters working to create a fuel break around homes.

UNDERSTANDING WILDFIRE

PREVENTING WILDFIRES

**MANY BIG FIRES ARE CAUSED BY SMALL MISTAKES, SO PLEASE BE CAREFUL, ESPECIALLY ON WINDY DAYS.
BEFORE STARTING A FIRE OUTDOORS, FIND OUT WHAT RULES AND FIRE RESTRICTIONS YOU NEED TO FOLLOW.**



**STAY WITH YOUR BARBEQUE
GRILL WHILE COOKING.**



**MAKE SURE YOU HAVE A
SCREEN ON YOUR CHIMNEY.**

PUT CIGARETTES OUT COLD.



SOAK FIREPLACE ASHES.





PARK YOUR CAR AWAY FROM TALL GRASS.



WATCH OUT WHEN WELDING.



BE CAREFUL WHEN BURNING WEEDS AND DEBRIS (BURN PERMIT REQUIRED).



DROWN AND STIR YOUR CAMPFIRE UNTIL IT IS COLD TO THE TOUCH.

PREVENTING WILDFIRES

PREPARING YOUR HOME

HERE ARE SOME SIMPLE THINGS THAT YOU CAN DO TO REDUCE THE POSSIBILITY OF YOUR HOUSE BEING DAMAGED BY A WILDFIRE:



CLEAN LEAVES FROM THE ROOF AND GUTTERS.



**USE OUTDOOR FURNITURE MADE OF
NONCOMBUSTIBLE MATERIALS.**



**CLEAR LEAVES, PINE
NEEDLES, AND TREE BARK
AWAY FROM STRUCTURES.**



STORE FIREWOOD AT LEAST 30 FEET AWAY FROM STRUCTURES AND EAVES.





USE LOW COMBUSTIBLE MATERIALS FOR WALLS, GATES, AND LANDSCAPING TO CREATE A SAFER BARRIER AGAINST FIRE.



THIN, TRIM, AND CUT TREES, SHRUBS, AND GRASS BACK A MINIMUM OF 30 TO 100 FEET FROM YOUR HOME CREATING A SURVIVABLE SPACE. IF POSSIBLE, EXTEND EVEN FURTHER OUT TO INCREASE YOUR CHANCE OF SURVIVING A WILDLAND FIRE.



TRIM GRASS AND BRUSH CREATING A CLEARED AREA AROUND PROPANE TANKS.



OTHER THINGS YOU CAN DO:

- Screen outside vents and openings, including the space beneath decks.
- Remove lumber, needles, and leaves from under decks and outdoor staircases.
- Store combustible fuels in a well-ventilated shelter away from structures.
- Add a fire department connection to your above-ground water storage or swimming pool for water supply for firefighting.

PREPARING YOUR HOME

FIRST CHOICE - EVACUATING SAFELY



THE IMPORTANT STUFF

Make a list of items to take with you and know where they are located. Consider gathering some of these items now and keeping them in a box that is ready to go.

THE SAFEST PLACE FOR YOUR FAMILY IS SOMEWHERE THAT IS NOT THREATENED BY A FIRE.

BY PLANNING AHEAD YOU CAN EVACUATE MORE QUICKLY AND BE SURE THAT YOU WILL REMEMBER THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS.

REMEMBER THE “FIVE Ps”

1. **PILLS**, eyeglasses and other medical supplies
2. **PAPERS**, like birth certificates and tax records
3. **PICTURES**, small artwork, jewelry and other important mementos
4. **PETS**, pet food, leashes and pet carriers
5. **PHONE**, charger and phone numbers of people you will want to call



ON THE ROAD

The evacuation route you use should be away from the fire and away from the direction that the fire is moving.

Identify several different routes so that you can choose the safest one. Try to avoid narrow roads that could easily become blocked.

- Take a vehicle that has enough gas for lots of slow driving and waiting.
- Leave gates open for easy access by firefighters.
- Drive slowly with your headlights on and doors unlocked. If it is smoky, close the windows and turn off any ventilation fan.
- Follow instructions from police and fire personnel.
- Do not return home until emergency personnel have determined that it is safe.
- If you are trapped by fire while you are in your car, park in an area that is clear of vegetation (a surface that is paved, gravel or dirt), close all windows and vents, cover yourself with a blanket or jacket and lie on the floor.
- Be aware that the car tires may burst. Stay in your car until the fire passes.



EMERGENCY PLANS - KNOW WHERE TO GO

Plan ahead and create an Emergency Plan for your own home. Contact your local fire, law enforcement or emergency management department about Emergency Plans within your neighborhood or community. Talk to your neighbors about how you can work together in the event of an emergency. You will be better prepared to safely reunite your family and loved ones during an emergency if you think ahead and communicate with others in advance.

If you evacuate, please check in at the location which has been designated as the local Evacuation Area. Here you will learn about shelter availability for you and your family and any locations that may provide temporary boarding for pets or large animals.

For more information about preparing for an emergency, go to:

Ready America (DHS & Citizen Corps)
<http://www.ready.gov>

American Red Cross
<http://www.redcross.org>

Arizona Division of Emergency Management (ADEM)
<http://www.dem.azdema.gov>

FIRST CHOICE - EVACUATING SAFELY

LAST RESORT - TAKING SHELTER IN A HOME

Evacuating may not be the safest thing to do. It might be safer for you to stay in your home, (or go to a neighbor's home) if any of these conditions exist:

- Your only escape route goes into the fire.
- Your only escape route is congested or blocked with vehicles.
- Smoke is so thick you can't see where you are going and you don't know where the fire is.
- The fire is so close or is moving so fast that you do not have time to evacuate safely.
- Emergency personnel (in person or by phone) recommend that you stay.



Is **YOUR** HOUSE A SAFE PLACE TO TAKE SHELTER?

IF ANY OF THESE DESCRIBE YOUR HOUSE YOU SHOULD **NOT STAY DURING A WILDFIRE.**

- The house has wood siding or wood shingles.
- The house is located in a narrow canyon or is on a steep slope with continuous thick vegetation below.
- There are dense shrubs near windows or sliding doors.
- There are lots of combustible materials next to the house, such as brush piles, wood piles or wood sheds.
- There are thick grass and trees growing right up to the house.

IF YOUR HOUSE IS **NOT A SAFE PLACE TO TAKE SHELTER,
THEN MAKE ARRANGEMENTS **NOW** TO STAY WITH A NEIGHBOR
WHOSE HOUSE IS MUCH SAFER.**

IF YOU TAKE SHELTER IN A HOME...

- Use a sprinkler to wet the yard and roof.
- Turn off all propane or natural gas to the house.
- Close all windows and doors to prevent sparks from blowing inside.
- Move fabric-covered furniture away from large windows or sliding doors.
- Turn off equipment that circulates air in the house.
- Gather your family, pets, a cell phone, a fire extinguisher, a battery-powered radio and some bottled water. Take a flashlight and extra batteries in case power is lost.
- Close all interior doors to slow the spread of smoke or fire in the house.



- Go to an interior room or hallway that is farthest from the approaching fire. Stay away from perimeter walls.
- Listen for fire information and instructions on a radio or television.
- Use your cell phone for necessary calls and leave your landline available for emergency officials or neighbors to call you. Make sure to have at least one phone plugged into the wall which doesn't require electricity to work.
- Keep your family together and remain as calm as possible. Remember, if it gets hot inside the house, it is much hotter outside.

AFTER THE FRONT PASSES AND THE THICK SMOKE CLEARS...

- Protect your lungs and airway by covering your nose and mouth with a dry cloth.
- Protect your skin by wearing cotton or wool long pants, a long sleeve shirt or jacket and gloves. Do not wear nylon or other synthetic fabrics.
- Avoid opening interior doors that feel hot.
- Use a garden hose or buckets of water to put out fires.
- Check each room and the exterior and roof of your house. Extinguish all sparks and embers.
- Look for concealed embers below decks and against fences.
- Watch out for downed power lines and weakened trees or branches that could fall down.
- See if your neighbors need help.
- Listen to the radio for instructions on what to do.

LAST RESORT - TAKING SHELTER IN A HOME

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Are You Prepared?



Terrain and vegetation are very diverse in Arizona's fire prone areas.

As part of your wildfire preparation, contact your local Fire Department or Fire Management Agency for information.

Some Useful Websites:

Firewise

<http://www.firewise.gov>

Arizona Fire Information

<http://www.azfireinfo.az.gov>

Southwest Area Coordination Center

<http://gacc.nifc.gov/swcc>