

# WILDFIRES

PREPARING | SURVIVING | RECOVERING



EMERGENCY READY

**ER™ Preparedness Guides**

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In 2020, 57,000 wildfires raged uncontrolled through regions of the Western U.S., burning more than 10 million acres, and forcing thousands of residents to evacuate. Wildfires devastate everything in their paths at a rate of 6 miles per hour in wooded areas and up to 14 mph in grassy terrain. These fiery infernos pose an increased risk to a growing number of communities due to climate fluctuations and human negligence. In California alone, over two million homes are located in high-risk areas for wildfires. Residents in these areas must take precautions to prepare for this burgeoning threat to lives and property.



# PREPARING

## LEARN ABOUT WILDFIRES

A wildfire is an out-of-control blaze fueled by dry vegetation ignited in a rural area. Wind, high temperatures, and droughts create favorable conditions for these widespread, fast-moving, highly destructive fires. Although considered nature's reset button, climate change coupled with human interference has made fragile ecosystems more susceptible to wildfires.

## WHAT CAUSES WILDFIRES?

According to the Insurance Information Institute (iii.org), human negligence accounts for 90% of the country's wildfires. These negligent acts include leaving campfires unattended, shooting illegal fireworks, burning debris, throwing out lit cigarette butts, and intentional arson. Lighting strikes and lava flows cause the remaining 10% of wildfires.

## WILDFIRE SEASON

Dry, hot climates create perfect conditions for wildfires. Wildfire season in the Western half of the U.S. typically begins in August and tapers off in November.

## KNOW YOUR AREA'S RISK

California experiences the most significant number of wildfires each year. As of 2020, over 2 million properties in California have a high risk of wildfire damage. Dry, hot summers in Texas, Colorado, Arizona, and Idaho also fuel destructive fires, putting millions of properties and residents at risk in the Western U.S.







## PREPARE YOUR HOME

If your home resides in an area prone to or at risk for wildfires, use this checklist to prepare and protect your home:

- Create a "defensible space" around your home:
  - Experts recommend moving any flammable objects at least 30 ft. away from your home or any other structures.
  - Flammable objects include firewood, lawn furniture and equipment, propane tanks, grills, and mulch.
  - Replace grass and mulch with concrete or rocks.
  - Plant fire-resistant plants and trees spaced apart to help reduce the fire's spread.
  - Keep branches trimmed at least 10 ft. from your roof.
  - Prune dead vegetation and branches.
  
- Use fire resistant materials to construct or renovate your house.
  
- Keep roof and gutters clean and inspect chimneys at least twice a year.
  
- Install smoke alarms on every level and teach family members how to use a fire extinguisher.
  
- Purchase a garden hose and sprinklers that can reach all sides of the house and any outdoor structures.
  
- Keep copies of essential documents, including identification, insurance policies, and financial records, in a secure, water and fire proof container. Include a household inventory (a list and photos or video of your belongings).



**NOTE:** On January 1, 2021, the California Public Resources Code was updated to require an “ember-resistant zone” by adding at least 5-feet of space between the physical structure of the home and any materials that can burn including outdoor equipment, firewood, shrubs, and trees. Insurance companies may use this mandate to evaluate your home's eligibility for fire coverage.

## **IDENTIFY EVACUATION ROUTES**

Learn and practice evacuation routes outlined by safety officials in your community. Identify shelters in your area by using the FEMA app or checking with local officials. Check with the shelter if pets are allowed. If not, make plans to shelter them with friends or family who reside outside the evacuation zone. Review your shelter's COVID-19 guidelines.

## **RECOGNIZE WARNINGS AND ALERTS**

Sign up for community alerts in your area. Monitor the news or radio for evacuation alerts. Ensure you have access to the Emergency Alert System (EAS).

## **WATCH VS. WARNING**

**Fire Weather Watch:** Be Prepared. Critical fire weather conditions are possible but not imminent or occurring.

**Red Flag Warning:** Take Action. Be extremely careful with open flames. Warm temperatures, dry conditions, and strong winds are predicted to increase fire danger. Do not throw cigarettes or matches outside a moving vehicle, extinguish all fires properly and never leave them unattended.





## BUILD A KIT

Store your survival kit in an easily accessible location. Your kit should include the following items:

**Food and Water:** a 7-day supply of fresh water and non-perishable food for each person in your family. Include food and water for your pets.

**Shelter Supplies:** thermal mylar blankets, sleeping bags, portable tents, tarps, and plastic sheeting

**Hygiene Items:** waterless shampoo and toothpaste, comb, toilet paper, tissue paper, wipes, portable toilet, disposable bags

**First Aid:** family-sized first aid kit and extra prescription medications

**PPE:** masks for each family member, sanitation wipes, hand sanitizer

**Lighting:** hand-crank/solar-powered flashlights, extra batteries, candles

**Communication Device:** Hand-crank/solar-powered radio with access to the NOAA weather-band emergency alert channels - do not rely on your cell phone for news and evacuation bulletins

**Tools:** shovels and pry bars for performing search and rescue operations, gas/water shut-off wrench

**Clothing:** keep an old pair of closed-toe shoes, and an extra pair of clothing in your kit for each family member

**Swimming Goggles:** protect your eyes from burning smoke



# SURVIVING

## AN EVACUATION IS IMMINENT BUT NOT YET ISSUED

- Keep a full tank of gas in your car.
- Check if your emergency shelter is outside the evacuation zone and open.
- Plan to take one car per family to reduce congestion and delay.
- Make transportation arrangements with friends or your local government if you do not own a car.
- Listen to a radio, television, or news apps for local evacuation instructions.
- Secure your home by closing all outside and inside doors and windows, remove flammable window coverings, move furniture towards the middle of each room, and shut off gas or propane sources.
- Turn on all sprinkler systems, place sprinklers on roof and leave them on.
- Leave lights on in each room to maintain visibility in smoke.
- Gather important papers and put them in your emergency kit.
- Begin packing the car with valuables and other essential items.
- Prepare pets for evacuation.
- Keep your cell phone charged.





## **WHEN AN EVACUATION IS ORDERED**

- Gather your family and pets and leave immediately if you are instructed to evacuate.
- Leave early enough to avoid being trapped in long lines of traffic.
- Follow recommended evacuation routes. Do not take shortcuts; they may be blocked.
- Bring your Survival Kit.
- Wear sturdy shoes and clothing that provides some protection, such as long pants, long-sleeved shirts, and a cap.
- Wear a face mask to reduce smoke inhalation.
- Share your evacuation plans with your emergency contacts.

## **DO NOT STAY AND "FIGHT" THE FIRE**

Do not risk your life to save your home. You have home owner's insurance for a reason. Furniture is replaceable, lives are not.

The majority of civilians who perish in wildfires waited too long to evacuate and were overcome by flames and smoke.



# RECOVERING

## AFTER THE FIRE

- Do not return home until you receive the all-clear from fire officials.
- When it is safe to return home, avoid smothering ruins, charred trees, and live embers.
- Wear protective clothing - long sleeve shirts, pants, work boots, and N95 face mask.
- Begin documenting and taking photos of damaged property.

## FILING A CLAIM

- Contact your insurance company as soon as possible.
- Do not throw anything away - all damage must be documented in order to file a complete claim.
- An insurance adjuster will most likely visit the home to inspect the damage.
- Be aware of any time limits on the claims process.

## RECOVER

- FEMA, the Red Cross, and state and local governments of the affected area may provide crisis counseling assistance.
- Communicate with and assist your neighbors and community. You are all in this together.





# RESOURCES

[READY.GOV/WILDFIRES](https://www.ready.gov/wildfires)

[INSURANCE INFORMATION INSTITUTE  
\(III.ORG\)](https://www.insuranceinformationinstitute.org)

[WEATHER UNDERGROUND  
WUNDERGROUND.COM](https://www.weatherunderground.com)

[FEMA.GOV/ASSISTANCE](https://www.fema.gov/assistance)

[REDCROSS.ORG/GET-HELP](https://www.redcross.org/get-help)

[CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL  
\(CDC.GOV/DISASTERS/WILDFIRES\)](https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/wildfires)

[THE NATIONAL CHILD TRAUMATIC  
STRESS NETWORK \(NCTSN.ORG\)](https://www.nctsn.org)

[WILDFIRE RISK TO COMMUNITIES  
\(WILDFIRERISK.ORG\)](https://www.wildfirerisk.org)

[U. S. FOREST SERVICE ACTIVE FIRE MAP  
\(FSAPPS.NWCG.GOV\)](https://www.fsapps.nwcg.gov)

[QUAKEKARE.COM/RESOURCES](https://www.quakekare.com/resources)

**QUAKE KARE**  
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