

## Appendix D: Structure Triage

Triage in the community wildfire protection plan context is the determination of priorities for action during a wildfire. The process historically has rated the likelihood that wildfire personnel can safely and successfully defend a structure while it is being threatened by a wildfire.

There is one serious flaw in this approach; it assumes that there will be adequate resources available to take some form of meaningful fire suppression action to defend the structure. When more than one structure is imperiled by a wildfire in a rural setting it is highly unlikely a local volunteer fire department will have sufficient apparatus and personnel to “protect” multiple structures simultaneously. Mutual aid in rural Colorado may take several hours to get to the fire ground.

Assigning a defensible rating to a structure can also lull homeowners into complacency if they think the local fire department will make Herculean efforts to save their home. In most instances the structure will have to survive on its own.

To avoid creating any false impressions about the ability of wildfire suppression personnel to protect every structure regardless the magnitude of the incident, a structure’s chance of surviving a wildfire is rated as probable or not probable. This approach is much more realistic and should encourage property owners to look at their homes in a new light.

Many factors are considered when assigning a survivability rating to a structure. The triage process is highly subjective. Wildfire behavior and structure interactions are not well suited to a clear cut “yes” or “no” analysis. The table below describes criteria used to determine structure survivability. The factors have been extracted from the Wildfire Hazard & Risk Assessment score sheet found in “Living on the Edge” (Troy & Kennedy 2007) and is based on NFPA 1144 standards.

It is important to understand that there are no guarantees a structure with a “probable” survival rating will be standing after an intense wildfire occurs. Similarly occasionally structures with a “not probable” survival assessment may endure a wildfire in spite of all rational analysis.

The survival rating is simply a reliable indicator of a probable outcome following a very dynamic, chaotic, unpredictable event. The rating has been assigned by an individual with over forty years of wildland fire experience considering the criteria below to make the prediction.

Survivability Criteria

PROBABLE	NOT PROBABLE
Vegetation light ~ Anderson fuel models 1 & 2	Vegetation medium to heavy &/or slash. Anderson fuel models 8, 9, 10, 11,
Survivable space >70 feet	Survivable space <71 feet
Slope <20%	Slope >21%
Topographic features minimize fire behavior	Topographic features adversely affect fire behavior
Area not exposed to unusually severe fire weather or strong dry winds	Areas exposed to unusually severe fire weather or strong dry winds
Separated from adjacent structures that can contribute to fire spread	In close proximity to structures that can contribute to fire spread
Class A & B roofing	Class C or non-rated roofing
Non-combustible/fire resistive siding, eaves & deck or combustible deck with no debris underneath	Combustible siding and deck
Building set back from slope appropriate distance	Building close to or overhanging slope
No fire wood and other combustible human plunder in close proximity to structure	Fire wood and other combustible human plunder on deck or within close proximity to structure
Hazardous materials appropriate distance away	Hazardous materials close to structure

Criteria shaded in light yellow automatically drop survivability to Not Probable. Non shaded criteria often influence survivability and cumulatively may predispose a structure to Not Probable survivability status.

*NOTE: You will find that access, escape routes, turnarounds, safety zones and water supply are not factored into the survivability rating. These items are important for firefighter safety but do not influence structure survivability. Remember fire control personnel will most likely not be defending the structure; it will have to go it alone. Safety concerns and limited availability of firefighting resources preclude active intervention to protect structures.*