

BAND TOGETHER

FIREWISE USA® PROGRAM TOOLKIT



FIREWISE USA®
Residents Reducing Wildfire Risks

BAND TOGETHER BEFORE WILDFIRE

HELPING COMMUNITIES TAKE MEASURES TO IMPROVE WILDFIRE DAMAGE OUTCOMES

We can't stop natural disasters from occurring. Wildfire, however, is one natural disaster where increased safety to homes and communities can result from taking simple, scientifically proven steps beforehand.

Members of your community can substantially improve fire outcomes by working together to do things like removing downed tree branches, dry leaves, and pine needles. Volunteers can assist neighbors with extra support and participate in coordinated local efforts, like community woodchipper events.



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WITH FELLOW PARTICIPANTS



Thank you for joining the communities and residents already taking steps to reduce wildfire damage and loss. This toolkit provides key info and participation tips.

Today's wildfires are occurring with increasing frequency and magnitude, especially in high-risk areas. While these fires continue to happen, taking preventative measures can be a small way to help protect your home, neighborhood, and the safety of your family.



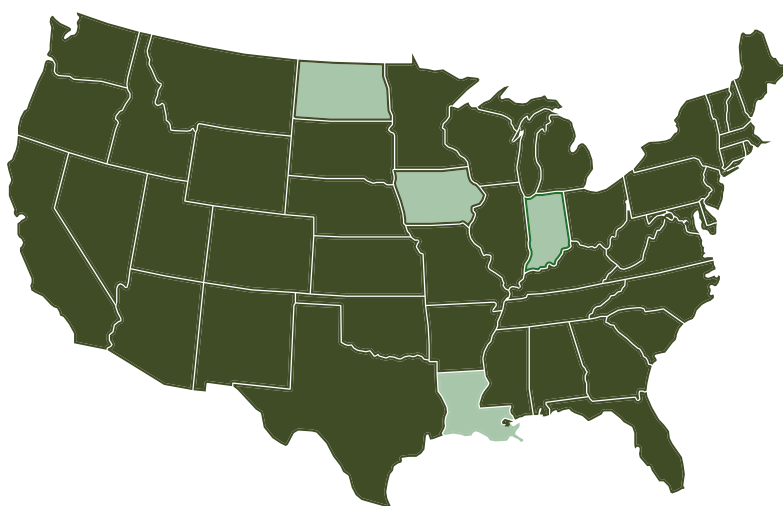
CELEBRATING 20+ YEARS

Firewise USA has been steadily gaining traction since 2002.

42 STATES

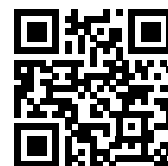
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RESIDENTS LIVING IN FIREWISE COMMUNITIES



LEARN MORE ABOUT FIREWISE USA®

Make your home safer from wildfire, help your community to get started, and create a login to begin your application.



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SECTION 1

HOME OWNERS

**THE FIREWISE USA® PROGRAM HELPS
HOMEOWNERS LEARN HOW TO BEST
ADDRESS WILDFIRE RISKS TO THEIR
PROPERTY AND SURROUNDINGS.**

Every year, devastating wildfires frequently occur across the United States. At the same time, population growth in high-risk areas is on the rise.

While these fires will continue to happen, many communities are taking actions to help mitigate the risks of wildfire and increase the safety of their families and homes.



REDUCE HOME IGNITION RISKS

ASSESSING THE RISKS TO YOUR HOME

When considering your home's "ignition risk," it can be helpful to think about the area around your home, or "home ignition zone." This includes your home at the center and everything within 100 feet (or 30 meters).

WHAT FACTORS AFFECT A HOME'S RISK FOR IGNITION?

A home's ignition risk is determined by its immediate surroundings and the materials used for its construction. The specific location isn't necessarily as influential as the landscape around it.

HOME IGNITION ZONES CAN BE DIVIDED INTO 4 PARTS:

"HOME ZONE"

The home itself and everything within 5 feet of the foundation.

Includes: Fences, decks, porches, and other attachments.

Recommended construction materials: Non-flammable or low flammable for new homes and retrofits — especially with roofs, siding, and windows.

Preventative measures: Remove flammables (debris, mulch, plantings) from roofs, eave lines, gutters, deck/porch surfaces, and within 5 feet of the home and any attachments.

5-30 FEET

Includes: Decks and fences, provides space for emergency fire suppression equipment.

Preventative measures: Keep lawns mowed and well-maintained; well-spaced plantings of low flammability species; swap mulch for rocks, gravel, or stone; remove large fuel packages like firewood piles from this area.

30-100 FEET

Preventative measures: Keep irrigated with low-growing and low-flammable plants; create separation between grasses, shrubs, and trees to avoid fire spreading into taller vegetation in a "fuel ladder" effect; space trees to prevent crowns from touching.

100+ FEET

Research shows that keeping high intensity fire 100 feet from a home will prevent the fire from igniting the home directly.

Preventative measures: Place low-growing plants and well-spaced trees; keep volume of vegetation (fuel) low.



FIREWISE USA® PARTICIPANTS KNOW THE VALUE OF HELPING NEIGHBORS

Firewise USA® provides up to date take-action information to residents that helps them change the outcome of a wildfire in terms of home and neighborhood safety. Residents who participate in the process create an action plan that commits them to a sustained program of wildfire risk reduction that is both physically doable and cost-effective.

CHECKLIST

Research shows taking simple, scientifically proven steps can help reduce the risk of your home and property becoming fuel for a wildfire. Band together with homeowners in your community to follow this list of actions throughout the year.

- ☐ **Clear** — ignitable material such as needles and leaves from roof, gutters, eaves, porches and decks.
- ☐ **Repair** — any loose or missing roof shingles/tiles and caulk any gaps or openings on roof edges.
- ☐ **Cover** — exterior attic vents and install metal wire mesh ($\frac{1}{8}$ inch or smaller) to under-eave and soffit vents.
- ☐ **Relocate** — items kept under decks or porches; swap out vegetation in these areas for rock or gravel.
- ☐ **Replace** — mulch with hardscaping, including rock, gravel or stone.
- ☐ **Remove** — ignitable features within 30 feet of all structures including firewood piles, portable propane tanks and dry and dead vegetation.
- ☐ **Protect** — water dry grass and shrubs, trim brown vegetation and dispose of yard waste.
- ☐ **Prune** — low hanging branches (6-10 feet for taller trees, $\frac{1}{3}$ of tree height for smaller trees); remove any tall grasses, vines and shrubs from under trees.
- ☐ **Contact** — neighbors and create a plan to address shared wildfire safety concerns together.

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FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS BAND TOGETHER

OVERLAPPING HOME IGNITION ZONES AND PUBLIC SPACES

Due to their size, it's very common for home ignition zones to overlap. Many communities also have commonly owned property, including natural or wooded areas that may pose a greater risk. This means that to be most effective, neighbors need to work together to achieve greater wildfire safety.

TOGETHER, COMMUNITY RESIDENTS CAN WORK TO ACCOMPLISH THE FOLLOWING:

- Assist neighbors who may have difficulty with property upkeep
- Make sure your Homeowner Association (HOA) is "Firewise-friendly" by complying with local vegetation management rules and construction materials usage
- Ensure homes and neighborhoods have legible, clearly marked street names and numbers
- Know "two ways out" of the neighborhood for safe evacuation during a wildfire
- Create phone and text trees to alert residents about local fires
- Learn more about wildfire preparedness and recovery at apci.org/wildfire

WILDFIRES DESTROYED
AN AVERAGE OF
7,115 STRUCTURES
ANNUALLY FROM 2011-2023



REDUCE FUEL THREATS TOGETHER

THREE BIGGEST WILDFIRE BEHAVIOR FACTORS:

1. Topography (lay of the land)
2. Weather (wind speed, relative humidity, and ambient temperature)
3. Fuel (vegetation and man-made structures)

EXTREME WILDFIRE BEHAVIOR, FUEL QUANTITY, AND WEATHER CONDITIONS OFTEN COINCIDE:

- Extended drought
- High winds
- Low humidity
- High temperatures
- Excessive fuel buildup (live and dead vegetation material)

FUEL IS THE ONLY ONE OF THESE FACTORS WITHIN OUR ABILITY TO CONTROL.

Fuel can be: **Dead leaves** and **pine needles** left on decks, in gutters and strewn across lawns can ignite from embers.

Shrubs and low hanging tree limbs that can be reached by fire moving along the ground.

Homes with flammable features. Unprotected attic vents, for example, allow firebrands entry into attics and to the flammable materials within. A burning home is a potential threat to surrounding homes and structures.





IN 2020 MORE THAN
58,000 FIRES
BURNED MORE THAN
10 MILLION ACRES
ACROSS THE U.S.

SECTION 2

FIREWISE® RECOGNITION

The national Firewise USA® recognition program helps communities get organized, find direction, and take action to reduce wildfire risks at the local level.

Next, you'll learn how the program works and where to get started.

This info is also available on our website.



HOW TO BECOME A FIREWISE USA® SITE

To earn recognition as a Firewise USA® site, a community must meet a set of voluntary criteria on an annual basis.

ORGANIZE IT

Create a volunteer board or committee to represent your community with a designated resident leader as the point of contact. This can be easily done with access to a Homeowners Association (HOA) or similar local group. Establish the boundaries of the site to contain a minimum of 8 dwelling units and a maximum of 2500. Then, use the program portal to register (portal.firewise.org/user/login).

PLAN IT

With a portal account, follow the guidelines to complete a community wildfire risk assessment. NFPA provides a free template and tutorial here, with additional videos on the website. The assessment needs to be updated at a minimum of every 5 years.

The risk assessment is the basis for creating a three-year action plan that identifies and prioritizes communitywide efforts to be taken each year. These may include overseeing local activities, events, investments, and homeowner education.

DO IT

Complete the actions identified in the plan to satisfy annual participation. Examples might include hosting community education workshops, distributing materials by print (or digitally), and organizing a Firewise Day.

Document the volunteer hours throughout the year. Each site must invest the equivalent of one volunteer hour per dwelling unit, annually. So, a site with 100 homes would require 100 volunteer hours (or monetary equivalent for incurred costs).

TELL US ABOUT IT

After meeting the criteria, the resident leader submits their community to attain “In Good Standing Status” and become a recognized Firewise USA® site. Each year, sites renew their status by reporting their activity.



CASE STUDY:
FIREWISE USA®

THE KEY TO REDUCING WILDFIRE LOSS: NFPA FIREWISE USA®



WHEN FIRE PREVENTION GETS PERSONAL

Fifteen years ago, a friend of Bob Long's lost their home in a wildfire. Since then, Bob's made it his mission to help educate his neighbors and nearby communities about the dangers of wildfire, and he's done it through Firewise USA®—which helps band communities together to take preventative action against wildfires such as removing downed trees and dry vegetation, hardening homes, and creating the safe zone around your home.

COMMUNITY THROUGH COMMUNICATION. CAMARADERIE THROUGH COLLABORATION.

After getting involved in his own community of 64 homes in Sherwood Forest, Long helped promote Firewise USA to neighboring communities. And what started as something small—printing and dropping off leaflets in mailboxes—grew into something much larger.

"As wildfires continued to affect national news, interest spread," Long said, "and when people see their neighbors getting involved, they tend to follow suit."

As interest grew, there was an opportunity to encourage those communities to work together. That led to the growth of the Nevada County Coalition of Firewise Communities (NCCFC)—an all volunteer grassroots organization that provides connection and integrated communication for Firewise USA recognized communities in Nevada County. Bob became the chair of the NCCFC in 2016 with 24 member-communities.

Today, the NCCFC is now home to 94 Firewise USA communities, with more waiting to join.

"We didn't know what to do before Firewise. Half of my neighbors lived through the 49er fire in 1988, yet in 2018 we still had the same issues," Long explained. "You'd still see junipers growing in the front yard, plants along houses, and we didn't know a thing about defensible space... Now, it is common to see a 'Zero Zone' around a home properly maintained."



SAFER COMMUNITIES AND HAPPIER HOUSES

The shaded fuel breaks popular with Nevada County helped save homes during the Bear River fire; its embers grazed several Firewise USA communities, but ultimately left them unscathed.

"It doesn't matter what you do, or how much you do, just do something. You form a committee, you come up with a small action plan—one that's doable—and you do it. Gradually, people see the changes being made. It will grow organically; people want to do the right thing."

—Bob Long

ORGANIC GROWTH THROUGH WORD-OF-MOUTH

Wildfires do happen though, even to those who are most prepared. A few years ago, a nearby community was affected by a wildfire. "They did everything right," Long recounted. "They had a 100-ft defensible space, but lived on a slope, etc."

Unfortunately, three of those homes burned down. But because of the Firewise USA precautions they took, the wildfire moved slowly enough for the fire department to arrive and create a barrier, which saved the rest of the neighborhood, according to Long. "And when those folks rebuilt their homes, they were rebuilding in a neighborhood—not a barren landscape."

So why should more communities participate in Firewise USA? "It's the right thing to do," Long said. "My home may burn, but I'll know I did everything I could to save it. And in the process, I could possibly save my neighbor's home, too."

And much like wildfires, all it takes is a spark for interest in fire protection to catch on. When asked how to recreate his county's Firewise USA success, Long's answer was simple: word of mouth.

“

"There's still about 40 communities working to become recognized. They weren't interested at first, but now they're seeing the work we've done—like shaded fuel breaks and defensible space—and they want in."

Bob Long

Former Chair, NCCFC



VISIT [NFPA.ORG/FIREWISE](https://www.nfpa.org/firewise) TO LEARN MORE

ABOUT FIREWISE®

The national Firewise USA® recognition program provides a collaborative framework to help neighbors in a geographic area get organized, find direction, and take action to increase the ignition resistance of their homes and community and to reduce wildfire risks at the local level. Any community that meets a set of voluntary criteria on an annual basis and retains an “In Good Standing Status” may identify itself as being a Firewise® Site.

ABOUT NFPA®

The National Fire Protection Association® (NFPA) is a global self-funded nonprofit organization, established in 1896, devoted to eliminating death, injury, property, and economic loss due to fire, electrical, and related hazards. NFPA launched Firewise USA in 2002, as the first program of its kind steadily gaining traction for over 20 years.

For complete program info,
visit nfpa.org/firewise.

