

WILDFIRE ACTION PLAN

YOUR FIRST WEAPON AGAINST WILDFIRE



VENTURA COUNTY WILDFIRE ACTION PLAN

Saving Lives and Property
through Advance Planning



The fire season is now a year-round reality in Ventura County, requiring firefighters and residents to be on heightened alert for the threat of wildfire throughout the year.

Each year, wildfires consume hundreds of homes in the Wildland/Urban Interface (WUI). However, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) estimates that as many as 80 percent of the homes lost to wildfires could have been saved if their owners had only followed a few simple fire-safe practices. In addition, wildfire-related deaths occur because people wait too late to leave their home or prepare inadequately to stay and defend it.

The Ventura County Fire Department takes every precaution to help protect you and your property from wildfire. However, the reality is that in a major wildfire, there will simply not be enough fire engines or firefighters to defend every home.

Successfully preparing for a wildfire requires **you** to take personal responsibility for protecting yourself, your family and your property. In this publication, we hope to give you the tips and tools you need to prepare and be successful.

Fire is, and always has been, a natural part of the beautiful area where we've chosen to live. Our brush-covered hills, canyons and forests burned periodically long before homes were built here. Wildfires, fueled by a build-up of dry vegetation and driven by seasonal hot, dry winds, are extremely dangerous and impossible to control. However, many residents have built their homes and landscaped without fully understanding the impact a fire could have on them, and few have adequately prepared their families for a quick evacuation or the prospect of staying to defend their home from fire.

It's not a question of **if** but **when** the next major wildfire will occur. That's why the most important person in protecting your life and property is not the firefighter, but you. Through advance planning and preparation, we can all be ready for wildfire. I hope you find the tips in the next pages helpful in creating heightened awareness and a more fire-safe environment for you and your family.

Bob Roper
Ventura County Fire Chief

INSIDE

Defensible Space	3
Emergency Supply Checklist	3
Stay or Go?	4
Prepare Your Family Checklist	5
A Wildfire-Ready Home	6-7
Leave Early Checklist	8
Stay And Defend Checklist	9
Your Own Wildfire Action Plan	10-11

This publication was prepared by the Ventura County Fire Department. Special thanks to the South Australian Country Fire Service, FireSafe Council, Firewise Communities, the American Red Cross, the Institute for Business and Home Safety and many other organizations for their contributions to content. Portions of this publication were adapted from *Living With Fire—A Guide for the Homeowner* written by Ed Smith, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension. Illustration services on pages 6-7 provided by Kirah Van Sickle and Animania, LLC.

Publication of the Wildfire Action Plan was made possible by a generous grant from Fireman's Fund and the C.M. Meiers Co.



DEFENSIBLE SPACE WORKS!

This photo of Ventura County homes that escaped a wildfire illustrates just how critically important defensible space can be. When clearing dry brush and weeds or mowing, be sure to do it before noon when temperatures are cooler and you are less likely to spark a fire.

BURN AREA

EMERGENCY SUPPLIES

The American Red Cross recommends every family have an emergency supply kit assembled long before a wildfire or other emergency occurs:

- A three-day supply of water (one gallon per person per day).
- Non-perishable food for all family members and pets (three-day supply).
- One change of clothing and footwear and one blanket or sleeping bag per person.
- A first aid kit, including your family's prescription medications.
- Emergency tools, including a battery-powered radio, flashlight and extra batteries.
- An extra set of car keys, credit cards, cash or traveler's checks.
- Sanitation supplies.
- Special items for infants, elderly or disabled family members.
- An extra pair of eyeglasses or contacts.
- Important family documents and contact numbers.
- A map marked with emergency evacuation routes.

For more information, visit the American Red Cross Web site at www.redcross.org.

SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO?



Leave Early? Stay and Defend?

If you live in the Wildland/Urban Interface area, then you are in danger of experiencing a wildfire.

During wildfires, evacuations are put in place to protect lives. **You can replace your property, but not your life.**

Brush fire fatalities most commonly occur when people leave their home too late or are overtaken by fire. If you live in an area that's at high risk for brush fire, your first choice should always be to leave early. If that is not possible, then you must be prepared to stay and defend your home.

Sheltering in place, or staying to defend your home, requires considerable planning. Fire agencies cannot make that decision for you. It's up to you to determine whether you are capable of staying and defending your home.

This guide will help you to develop your **Wildfire Action Plan** and decide whether you should stay or go.

If You Live in an Area Prone to Brush Fire:

- Your property should be well-prepared before a wildfire arrives.
- Appropriately prepared and constructed buildings offer protection during brush fires, reducing the likelihood of injury or death.
- Firefighting resources cannot always protect every property. Those planning to stay and defend their home must be prepared to be self-sufficient.
- A decision to stay and defend a well-prepared property or to leave early must be made well ahead of the arrival of a wildfire.
- In planning to leave early, you must know where you are going, how you will get there and what "trigger point" you will use to initiate your plan.
- Those who doubt their ability to cope with a wildfire should leave well before fire impacts their area.
- Evacuation at the last minute, ahead of a brush fire, is very dangerous.
- Large-scale, mass evacuations of communities require significant lead times. The safest course of action is to have a well-rehearsed plan in place to leave early or stay and defend long before the onset of a wildfire.

POP QUIZ

Are you physically fit to fight small fires in and around your home for up to 10 hours or more?

Are you and your family members mentally, physically and emotionally able to cope with the intense smoke, heat, stress and noise of a brush fire while defending your home?

Can you protect your home while also caring for members of your family, pets, etc.?

Do you have the necessary resources and equipment to effectively fight a fire?

Does your home have defensible space of at least 100 feet and is it cleared of flammable materials and vegetation?

Is your home constructed to resist fire?

If you answered "No" to any of these questions, then plan to leave early.

CREATE YOUR WILDFIRE ACTION PLAN

Your **Wildfire Action Plan** must be prepared with all members of your household well in advance of a fire.

Use these checklists to help you prepare your plan to either **Leave Early** or **Stay and Defend**.

Each family's **Wildfire Action Plan** will be different, depending on their situation.

Once you finish your plan, rehearse it regularly with your family and keep it in a safe and accessible place for quick implementation.

PREPARE YOUR FAMILY



Whether you decide to leave early or stay and defend:

- Create a **Family Disaster Plan** that includes meeting locations and communication plans and rehearse it regularly. Include in your plan the evacuation of large animals such as horses.
- Have fire extinguishers on hand and train your family how to use them.
- Ensure that your family knows where your gas, electric and water main shut-off controls are and ensure how to use them.
- Plan several different escape routes.
- Designate an emergency meeting location outside the fire hazard area.
- Assemble an emergency supply kit as recommended by the American Red Cross.
- Appoint an out-of-area friend or relative as a point of contact so you can communicate with family members if you get separated.
- Maintain a list of emergency contact numbers posted near your phone and in your emergency supply kit.
- Keep an extra emergency supply kit in your car, in case you have to leave quickly or can't get to your home because of fire.
- Have a portable radio or scanner so you can stay updated on the fire.

TOUR A WILDFIRE-READY HOME

Home Site and Yard: Ensure you have at least a 100-foot radius of defensible space (cleared vegetation) around your home. Note that even more clearance may be needed for homes in severe hazard areas.

Cut dry weeds and grass before noon when temperatures are cooler to reduce the chance of sparking a fire.

Landscape with fire-resistant plants that have a high moisture content and are low-growing. For a list of recommended plants (and plants to avoid), visit <http://fire.countyofventura.org>.

Keep woodpiles, propane tanks and combustible materials away from your home and other structures such as garages, barns and sheds.

Ensure that trees are far away from power lines.

Roof: Your roof is the most vulnerable part of your home because it can easily catch fire from wind-blown embers. Homes with wood-shake or shingle roofs are much more likely to be destroyed during a wildfire than homes with fire-resistant roofs.

Build your roof or re-roof with fire-resistant materials that include composition, metal or tile.

Clear pine needles, leaves and other debris from your roof and gutters.

Cut any tree branches within ten feet of your roof.

Windows: Heat from a wildfire can cause windows to break even before the home ignites. This allows burning embers to enter and start internal fires. Single-paned and large windows are particularly vulnerable.

Install dual, triple-paned or tempered glass windows to eliminate the prospect of breakage in a fire.

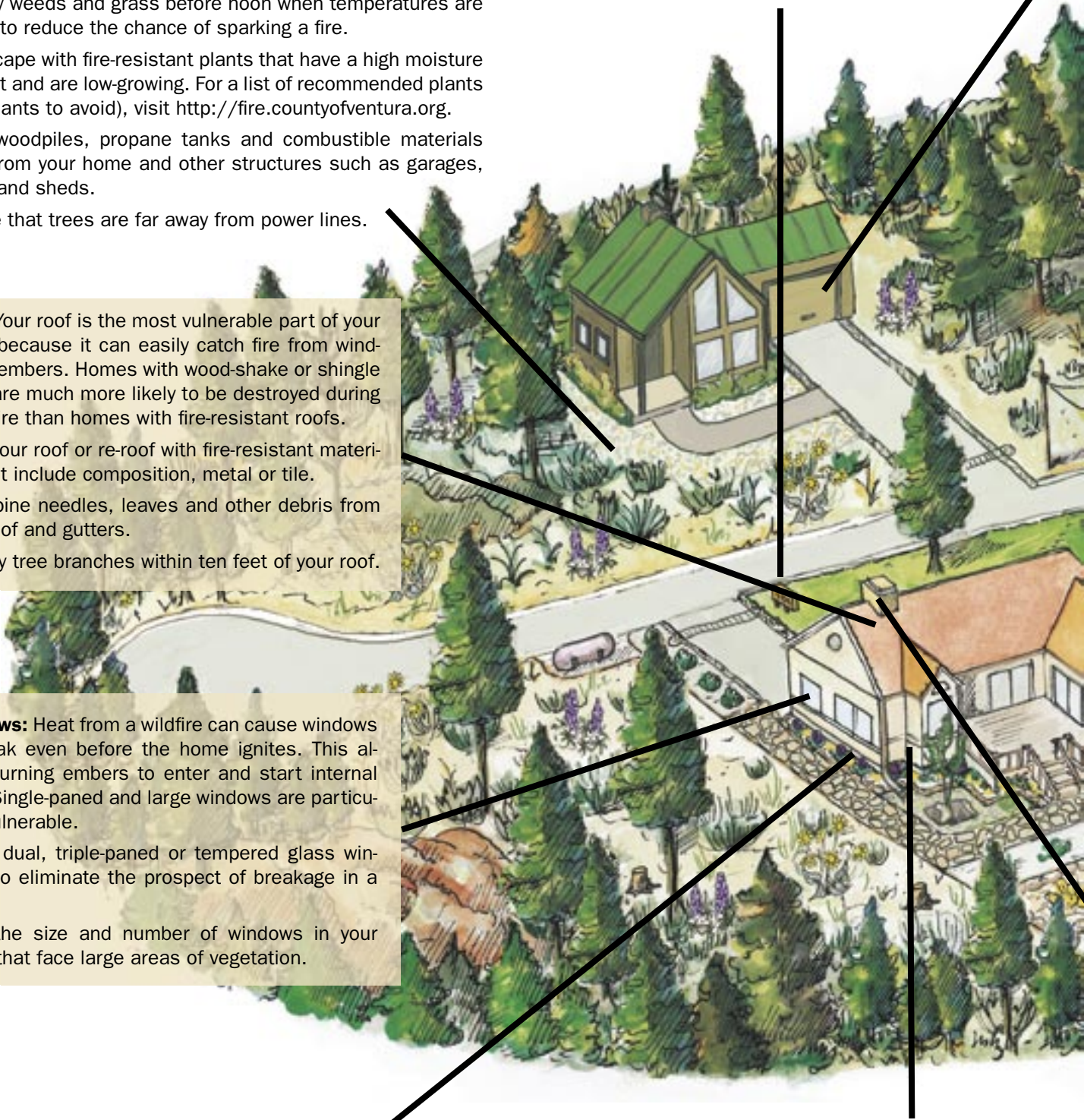
Limit the size and number of windows in your home that face large areas of vegetation.

Vents: Vents on homes are potential entry points for flying embers.

All vent openings should be covered with 1/4-inch or smaller metal mesh. Do not use fiberglass or plastic mesh because they can melt and burn.

Inside: Keep working fire extinguishers on hand. Install smoke detectors on each level of your home and near bedrooms. Test them monthly and change the batteries twice a year.

Address: Make sure your address is clearly visible from the road.



Walls: Wood products, such as boards, panels or shingles, are common siding materials. However, they are combustible and not good choices for fire-prone areas. Build or remodel with fire-resistant building materials, such as brick, cement, masonry or stucco.

Garage: Have a fire extinguisher and tools such as a shovel, rake, bucket and hoe available for fire emergencies.

Install a solid door with self-closing hinges between living areas and the garage.

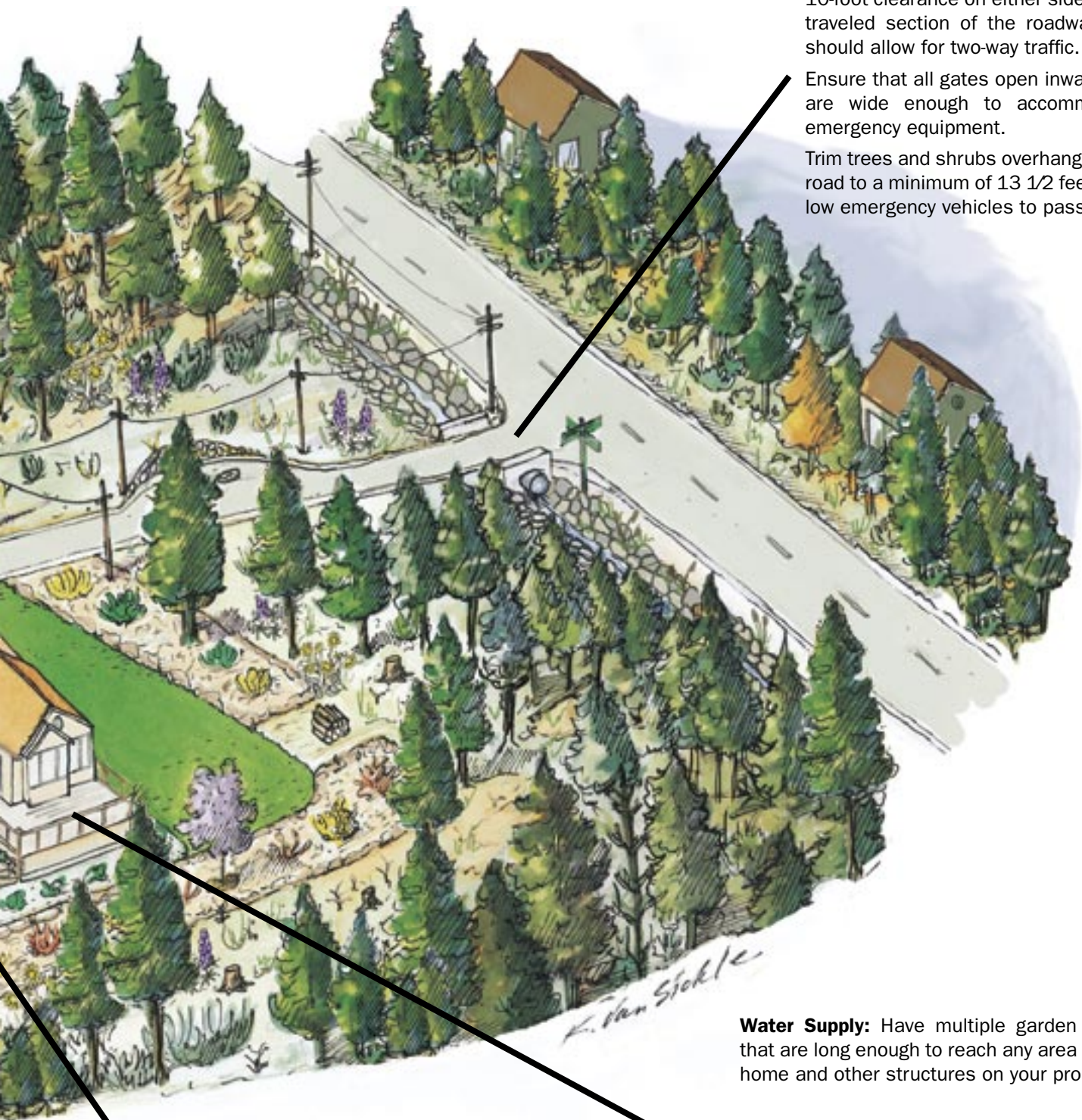
Store all combustibles and flammable liquids away from ignition sources.

Driveways and Access Roads: Driveways should be designed to allow fire and emergency vehicles and equipment to reach your house.

Access roads should have a minimum 10-foot clearance on either side of the traveled section of the roadway and should allow for two-way traffic.

Ensure that all gates open inward and are wide enough to accommodate emergency equipment.

Trim trees and shrubs overhanging the road to a minimum of 13 1/2 feet to allow emergency vehicles to pass.



Chimney: Cover your chimney outlet and stovepipe with a non-flammable screen of 1/2-inch wire mesh or smaller to prevent embers from escaping and igniting a fire.

Make sure that your chimney is at least 10 feet away from any tree branches.

Water Supply: Have multiple garden hoses that are long enough to reach any area of your home and other structures on your property.

Deck: Use heavy timber or non-flammable construction material for decks.

Enclose the underside of balconies and above-ground decks with fire-resistant materials to prevent embers from blowing underneath.

Keep your deck clear of combustible items, such as baskets, dried flower arrangements and other debris.

LEAVE EARLY

By leaving early, you give your family the best chance of surviving a wildfire. You also help firefighters by keeping roads clear of congestion, enabling them to move more freely and do their job.

INSIDE

Close doors, windows, vents, blinds or non-combustible window coverings and heavy drapes. Remove lightweight curtains.

Shut off gas at the meter. Turn off pilot lights.

Move flammable furniture into the center of the home, away from windows and doors.

Turn on lights so firefighters can locate your house under smoky conditions.

Shut off the air conditioning.

OUTSIDE

Turn off propane tanks.

Place combustible patio furniture inside.

Connect garden hoses to outside taps.

Don't leave sprinklers on or water running – they can waste critical water pressure.

Leave exterior lights on.

Seal attic and ground vents with pre-cut plywood or commercial seals.

WHEN TO LEAVE

Leave early enough to avoid being caught in fire, smoke or road congestion. **Don't wait to be told by authorities to leave.** In an intense wildfire, they may not have time to knock on every door. If you are advised to leave, don't hesitate!

WHERE TO GO

Leave to a predetermined location (it should be a low-risk area, such as a well-prepared neighbor or relative's house, a Red Cross shelter or evacuation center, motel, etc.)

HOW TO GET THERE

Have several travel routes in case one route is blocked by the fire or by emergency vehicles and equipment. Choose an escape route away from the fire.

WHAT TO TAKE

Take your emergency supply kit containing your family and pet's necessary items, such as cash, water, clothing, food, first aid kits, medications and toys. Also, don't forget valuables, such as your computer CPU, photos and important documents.

Organize your family members and make arrangements for your pets.



STAY AND DEFEND

AS THE FIRE APPROACHES

FAMILY CHECKLIST

Alert family and neighbors.

Dress in appropriate clothing (i.e., clothing made from natural fibers, such as cotton, and work boots). Have goggles and a **dry** bandana or particle mask handy to protect your eyes and lungs.

Ensure that you have your brush fire survival kit on hand that includes necessary items, such as long-sleeved cotton or wool clothing for all family members, a battery powered radio, spare batteries, emergency contact numbers, and ample drinking water.

Stay tuned to your TV or local radio stations for updates, or check the fire department Web site at: <http://fire.countyofventura.org>.

Remain close to your house, drink plenty of water and keep an eye on your family and pets.

OUTSIDE CHECKLIST

Gather up flammable items from the exterior of the house and bring them inside (e.g., patio furniture, children's toys, door mats, etc.).

Turn off propane tanks.

Back your car into the garage. Shut doors and roll up windows. Leave the key in the ignition in case you have to make a quick escape.

Have a ladder available.

Patrol your property and extinguish all small fires.

Seal attic and ground vents with pre-cut plywood or commercial seals.

INSIDE CHECKLIST

Shut all windows and doors, leaving them unlocked.

Remove flammable window shades and curtains and close metal shutters.

Move flammable furniture to the center of the room, away from windows and doors.

Connect a garden hose to the washing machine faucet to create an inside fire hose.

Fill bath, sinks and buckets with water.

Place wet towels in gaps under doors.

Leave your lights on.

Shut off the air conditioning.

AS THE FIRE ARRIVES

Bring hoses, buckets and other firefighting tools inside with you. Keep your family and pets together in a safe location inside your home.

Shelter away from outside walls.

Patrol inside your home for spot fires and extinguish them.

Ensure you can exit the home if it catches fire. (Remember that if it's hot inside the house, it's at least four to five times hotter outside.)

Stay hydrated.

Know that smoke detectors may be set off.

AFTER THE FIRE HAS PASSED

Check the roof and extinguish any fires, sparks and embers.

Check inside the attic for hidden embers.

Patrol your property and extinguish fires.

Ensure safety of family members and pets.

Continue to drink plenty of water.



Write up your Wildfire Action Plan and post it in a location where every member of your family can see it. Rehearse it with your family.

WILDFIRE ACTION PLAN - LEAVE EARLY

During Red Flag Alert days in your area, monitor your local media for information on brush fires and be ready to implement your plan. Hot, dry and windy conditions create the perfect environment for a wildfire.

Important Phone Numbers:

Emergency:

School:

Family:

Friends:

When to go:

Where to go:

How to get there:

What to take:

Who to tell (before and after):

WILDFIRE ACTION PLAN - STAY AND DEFEND

During Red Flag Alert days in your area, monitor your local media for information on brush fires and be ready to implement your plan.

Important Phone Numbers:

Emergency:

School:

Family:

Friends:

As the fire approaches:

As the fire front arrives:

After the fire has passed:



VENTURA COUNTY FIRE DEPARTMENT

If you have an emergency, call 911

Public Information Office: 805-389-9769

Wildfire Hotline (during major wildfires only): 805-388-4276

Web site: <http://fire.countyofventura.org>

LEAVE EARLY? STAY and DEFEND?

