

READY, SET, GO!

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YOUR PERSONAL WILDFIRE ACTION GUIDE



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Wildfire Action Guide

Saving Lives and Property through Advance Planning

While spring and fall are the primary wildfire seasons in Wisconsin, wildfires can occur any time the ground is not snow-covered, requiring firefighters and residents to be on heightened alert for the threat of wildfire.

Each year, wildfires consume hundreds of homes in the wildland urban interface. Studies show 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 Firewise practices. In addition, civilian injury and deaths occur when people try to suppress wildfires they unintentionally started or because people wait too long to leave their home. Leaving late is a growing national problem, as well as a local concern in Wisconsin.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and your local fire department take every precaution to help protect you and your property from wildfire. However, the reality is that in a major wildfire event, there will simply not be enough fire resources or firefighters to defend every home.

Fire has always been a natural occurrence in the wildland. Historically, our forests burned periodically long before we built homes there. Wildfires today are most often caused by people, are fueled by a build-up of dry vegetation, driven by seasonal weather patterns, and can be extremely dangerous and difficult to control. Many people have built homes or moved into fire-prone areas without fully understanding how to live in a wildfire environment and few have adequately prepared their families for a quick evacuation should a wildfire occur.

Successfully preparing for a wildfire enables you to take personal responsibility for protecting yourself, your family and your property. In this Ready, Set, Go! Action Guide, our goal is to provide the tips and tools you need to prepare for a wildfire threat; have situational awareness when a fire starts; and to leave early when instructed to do so.

The Ready, Set, Go! Program works in complimentary and collaborative fashion with the Firewise Communities/USA® program and other existing wildfire public education efforts. Utilizing firefighters, it amplifies their messages to individuals to better achieve the common goal of wildfire preparedness.

It's not a question of if, but rather when, the next major wildfire will occur. Through advance planning, understanding and preparation, we can all be partners in the wildfire solution. The tips on the following pages are designed to create heightened awareness and a more fire-safe environment for you, your family and firefighters.



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Living in the Wildland Urban Interface

Ready, Set, Go! begins with a house that can survive on its own.



Research has shown that the characteristics of buildings and their immediate surroundings determine the risk of ignition. That's why preparing your home and the area around your home is so important. The steps you take to reduce or change the fuels in your home ignition zone could determine whether or not your house survives a wildfire. For example, raking leaves out of your yard may prevent a surface fire from burning right up to your house. A windblown ember which lands in a rain gutter free of debris will not have any fuel to ignite and so will extinguish. Since you, as the homeowner, are the only one who has authority to make changes around your home, you have a vital role in protecting it.

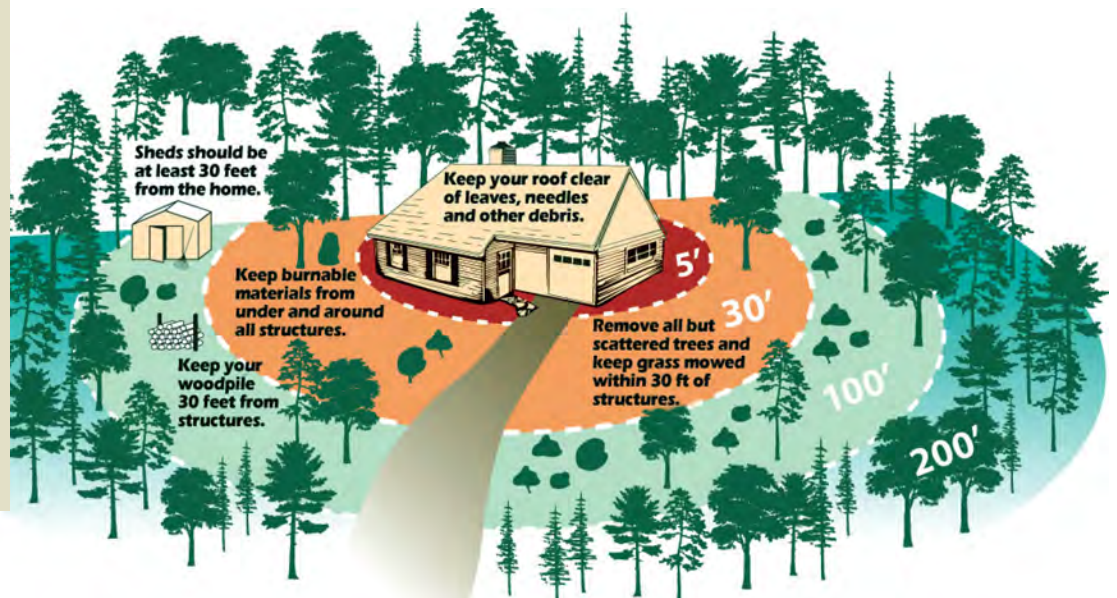
Be Ember Aware!

Firebrands are burning embers produced by wildfire which are lifted high into the air and carried beyond the fire front. Firebrands are one of the major causes of homes burned during a wildfire. Typical firebrand materials include things like pine cones, bark and small twigs. Depending on wind speed and size of materials, firebrands can be carried more than half a mile ahead of the fire front. A major wildfire event can produce a blizzard of millions of firebrands. If these firebrands land in areas with easily ignited fuels, such as dry grass, accumulated leaves or pine needles, firewood, or other dried out material, new fires can start. Due to these firebrands, homes located well away from the main fire front can be threatened.



What is the Home Ignition Zone?

The home ignition zone is your home and its surroundings out to 100-200 feet. In this area, vegetation and personal property is managed and maintained to reduce the wildfire threat and improve the likelihood of your home surviving with little or no assistance from firefighters.



Zone One

3-5 feet around your home, deck, porch and outbuildings

- Remove anything that can burn, including mulch, grass, plants, shrubs and any flammable man-made objects.
- If you do plant here, choose deciduous plants and shrubs over evergreens.
- Bare dirt or rock mulch is a better choice than wood mulch.
- Continuously remove any debris, leaves, etc. that collect in this area.

Zone Two

5-30 feet around your home, deck, porch and outbuildings

- Keep it lean, clean and green by mowing often, watering plants and raking away leaf litter.
- Remove all dead or dying vegetation.
- Trim trees to remove branches within six feet of the ground and at least ten feet away from roofs.
- Choose deciduous trees and shrubs over evergreens.
- Remove combustible material and vegetation from around and under decks.
- Remove “ladder fuels” (low-level vegetation that allows fire to spread from the ground to tree canopies).
- Relocate wood piles and other combustible materials into Zone Three.

Zone Three

30-100 feet from the home

- Plants should be low-growing, well-watered and less flammable.
- Leave 20 feet between trees.
- Favor deciduous trees and shrubs over evergreens.

Zone Four

100-200 feet from the home

- For homes built on slopes and in pine plantations, remove build-up of woody debris on the forest floor.
- Thin trees to leave space between tree canopies.

For more information on the home ignition zone, go to dnr.wi.gov and enter the keyword “Firewise.”

What is a Firewise Home?

Improving your home's chance of surviving a wildfire can seem like an overwhelming task – one that you may feel is impossible to achieve. Not necessarily so! Research shows that flying embers (firebrands) and creeping surface fire are significant contributors to the loss of homes to wildfires...sometimes hours after the fire has passed. To begin making your home and property "Firewise," start with the structures on your property and move out as time allows. Keep in mind that anything attached to a structure (deck, fence, overhang, etc.) is part of the structure.



Fire-resistant roof and siding, boxed-in eaves, an enclosed deck and the use of rock mulch make this home Firewise.

Fire-resistant building materials and adequate defensible space helped this home survive a crown fire.



Rock mulch and sparse vegetation along this home are Firewise choices.



Screening under-deck areas to keep debris from collecting underneath is a Firewise choice.



Tour a Firewise Home Site



Outbuildings

Garages, storage sheds, and other outbuildings located near homes can threaten the survivability of the home during a wildfire. If an outbuilding close to the home begins burning, the home could ignite. Outbuildings should be at least 30 feet away from the home and the vegetation should be managed around them.

Chimney

Cover your chimney and stove-pipe outlets with a non-flammable screen of ½ inch wire mesh to prevent embers from escaping and igniting a fire.

Decks & Attachments

Anything attached to the home should be considered part of the home. Combustible decks, balconies, porches, overhangs, carports, fences, and walkways can be ignited by radiant or convective heat or firebrands. These are especially vulnerable places for surface fire and embers to ignite debris and possibly your home. The possibility of an attachment or overhang igniting increases when flammable materials are on or underneath them. Attachments and overhangs should be kept free of flammable materials such as fallen leaves and pine needles, firewood, gas cans, and other flammable materials.

Flammables

Keep wood piles, propane tanks and other combustible materials 30 feet away from your home and other buildings.

Home Site & Yard

The vegetation 100 feet around your home should be managed; the managed area extends out to 200 feet if your home is surrounded by pine trees. This may mean looking past what you own to determine the impact a neighbor's yard will have on your property during a wildfire.

Windows

Radiant heat from burning vegetation or a nearby structure can cause the glass in windows to break. This will allow embers to enter and start internal fires. Single-pane and large picture windows are particularly vulnerable to glass breakage. Install dual-paned windows with a minimum of one pane being tempered glass to reduce the chance of breakage during a fire.

Roof

The roof can be a vulnerable part of your home because it provides a large horizontal surface where embers can land and ignite combustible materials. It is very important that roofing materials be fire-resistant and debris is removed from roof valleys, rain gutters and locations where the roof intersects a wall. Prune tree branches within 10 feet of your roof.

Signs

All road name and address signs should be clearly visible and legible from the roadway to avoid delays in response.

Eaves & Eave Troughs (Rain Gutters)

Eaves (the projecting roof edges), fascia, soffits and rain gutters are susceptible to flying embers and flame exposure. They should be constructed of non-combustible materials. Eaves should be boxed-in to prevent flying embers from entering. Rain gutters should be kept free of debris.

Vents

Attic and under-eave vents that are un-screened can draw embers into the attic, igniting the structure from the inside. All vent openings should be covered with $\frac{1}{4}$ inch corrosion-resistant wire mesh. Plastic and nylon mesh are not appropriate options as they can easily melt.

Garage Doors

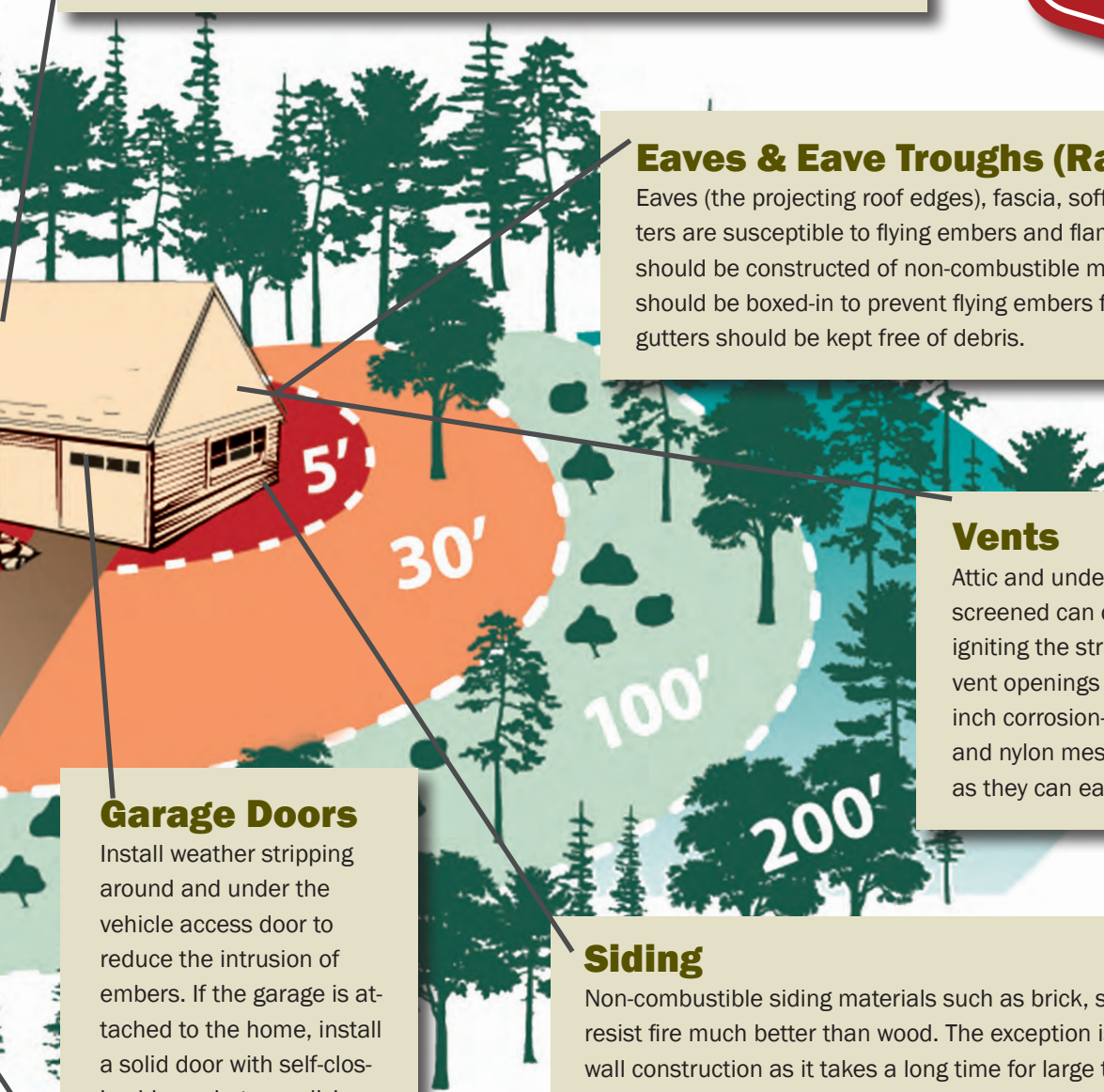
Install weather stripping around and under the vehicle access door to reduce the intrusion of embers. If the garage is attached to the home, install a solid door with self-closing hinges between living areas and garage.

Siding

Non-combustible siding materials such as brick, stucco, and fiber-cement resist fire much better than wood. The exception is heavy timber or log wall construction as it takes a long time for large timbers to ignite and burn. Vinyl siding can melt, fall off and burn when exposed to flames and radiant heat, which can leave openings and make the home even more vulnerable to radiant heat, flames and flying embers.

Driveways

should be designed to provide access for large fire-fighting equipment, including an unobstructed width of 12 to 20 feet and unobstructed height of 13 to 15 feet. Long driveways should provide a turnout to accommodate two-way traffic. Gates will slow access to a property or can result in a property not being accessed at all.



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Create Your Own Fire Action Plan

Now that you've done everything you can to protect your house, it's time to prepare your family. 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 Wildfire Action Plan. Each family's 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.

READY – Preparing for the Fire Threat

Wildfires in Wisconsin are very fast moving and conditions change rapidly. You may only have advance notification of a few minutes to an hour or two at most that you need to evacuate. Therefore it is imperative that you prepare in advance.



- ❑ **Create a Family Disaster Plan** that includes meeting locations and communication plans and rehearse it regularly.
- ❑ **Plan to take the Four P's:** Papers (important personal documents regarding home ownership, insurance, birth records, wills, credit cards, cash, etc.), Prescriptions (all medications you will need for several days, medical/dental/vision records and the names and telephone numbers of your family's physicians), Pictures (family photos, albums, or videos), and Pets (include food and water, any medications, leash, and consider putting them in cages since animals can panic too).
- ❑ **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 how to use them.

- ❑ **Plan several** different evacuation 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 who have relocated.
- ❑ **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 can't get to your home because of fire.
- ❑ **Have a portable radio** or scanner so you can stay updated on the fire.

SET – Situational Awareness when a Fire Starts

If you are aware that a wildfire is in the vicinity and are not in immediate danger, prepare for the worst case and do the following:

- ❑ **Be ready** to go when notified.
- ❑ **Alert family** and neighbors.
- ❑ **Collect up those important personal items** and place them in your vehicle.
- ❑ **Park your vehicle outside** the garage, facing the exit.
- ❑ **Close all windows** and metal shutters (if installed).
- ❑ **Open window shades** and curtains.
- ❑ **Turn outside lights on** to help firefighters see your house under smoky conditions.
- ❑ **Remove flammable** deck furniture and door mats.
- ❑ **Put ladders up against the roof** (non-flammable ones).
- ❑ **Turn on your garden hoses**, with sprinklers attached. The idea is to saturate all around the base of your home and yard as best you can.
- ❑ **Turn off** propane tanks.



GO – Leave Early

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

WHAT TO TAKE

Take your emergency supply kit containing your family and pet's necessary items. Leave your house/cabin unlocked with a note inside of who evacuated, where you are heading and the time and date.

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 wildland fire, 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, local school, 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. Drive with your headlights on.

EMERGENCY SUPPLIES

The American Red Cross recommends every family have an emergency supply kit assembled long before a wildland fire or other emergency occurs. Use the checklist below to help assemble yours. For more information on emergency supplies, visit the American Red Cross Web site at www.redcross.org.

- ❑ **Three-day supply of water** (one gallon per person per day).
- ❑ **Non-perishable food** for all family members and pets (three-day supply).
- ❑ **First aid** kit.
- ❑ **Flashlight**, battery-powered radio, and extra batteries.
- ❑ **An extra set of car keys**, credit cards, cash or traveler's checks.
- ❑ **Sanitation** supplies.
- ❑ **Extra eyeglasses** or contact lenses.
- ❑ **Important family documents** and contact numbers.
- ❑ **Map** marked with evacuation routes.
- ❑ **Prescriptions** or special medications.
- ❑ **Family photos** and other irreplaceable items.
- ❑ **Easily carried** valuables.
- ❑ **Personal computers** (information on hard drives and disks).
- ❑ **Chargers** for cell phones, laptops, etc.

Note: Keep a pair of old shoes and a flashlight handy in case of a sudden evacuation at night.



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

My Personal Wildfire Action Guide

During high fire danger days in your area, monitor your local media for information and be ready to implement your plan. Hot, dry and windy conditions create the perfect environment for a wildfire. Fire danger information can be found at dnr.wi.gov (search 'fire danger').

Important Phone Numbers:

Out of Area Contact: _____ Phone: _____

Work: _____

School: _____

Other: _____

Evacuation Routes:

Where to Go:

Location of Emergency Supply Kit:

Notes:

READY, SET, GO! **WISCONSIN** Residential Safety Checklist

Tips to Improve Family & Property Survival During a Wildland Fire

Home	Yes	No
1. Does your home have a metal, composition, or other non-combustible roof?		
2. Are the rain gutters and roof free of leaves, needles and branches?		
3. Are all vent openings screened with 1/4 inch (or smaller) mesh metal screen?		
4. Are approved spark arrestors on chimneys?		
5. Does the house have noncombustible siding material?		
6. Are the eaves "boxed in" using noncombustible materials?		
7. Are the windows double-paned?		
8. Is the underdeck area free of combustible material?		
9. Is all firewood at least 30 feet from the house?		

Home Ignition Zone	Yes	No
1. Is dead vegetation removed in the area 100-200 feet around your home?		
2. Is there separation between shrubs and trees?		
3. Are ladder fuels removed?		
4. Is there a clean and green area extending at least 30 feet from the house?		
5. Does the 0-5 feet zone have noncombustible materials and sparse vegetation?		
6. Is there recommended separation between the crowns of trees?		

Emergency Access	Yes	No
1. Is the home address visible from the street?		
2. Is the home address made of fire-resistant materials?		
3. Are street signs present at every intersection leading to the house?		
4. Are street signs made of fire-resistant materials?		
5. Does the driveway have adequate height and width clearance to allow emergency vehicle access?		
6. If a long driveway is present, does it have a suitable turnaround area?		

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