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DisasterPreparedness/2012-01

Wildland Fire Preparedness

Wildland fires are one of the most destructive natural forces known to mankind. The threat from wild fires to people living near wildland areas or using recreational facilities in wilderness areas is real. Seasonally dry conditions and times of drought greatly increase the potential for wildland fires. U.S. wildfires annually cause hundreds of millions to billions of dollars of damage to homes, businesses, infrastructure and agricultural crops, and burn hundreds of thousands of acres of woodland.

- In nature, wildland fires are typically caused by lightning.
- The majority of wildland fires are human caused, either intentional or accidental.
- The term “wildfire” is applied to any unwanted and unplanned fire burning in the forest, shrubs or grass.

Wildland Fire Classes: The three classes of wildland fires are surface, ground and crown.

- Surface: Most common type
 - Burns along the forest floor, moving slowly and killing or damaging trees and brush
- Ground: Most commonly started by lightning
 - Burns on or below the forest floor from the humus layer to the mineral soil
- Crown: Most dangerous type
 - Spreads rapidly by wind and moves by jumping from treetop to treetop

Be Prepared: *Before a Wildland Fire*

Develop Emergency Plans: Families, schools and workplaces should develop written emergency plans. Plans should be practiced; home plans should be shared with friends and extended family. Complete plans include:

- How to evacuate and evacuation routes
- Family meeting places
- Instructions for children and also provisions for pets
- Plans should also include house fireproofing, getaway and family emergency provisions

Know your Evacuation Routes: Determine the best evacuation routes from your home, city and state in advance of wildland fire seasons and have prearranged places to meet.

- Typically, families forced to evacuate do so together
- If children are home alone they should have firm instructions to leave home at the first threat of danger and should report to the prearranged meeting place
- Children should stay there until they hear from parents or other family members

- Should children encounter a threatening situation upon arriving home, they should be instructed to go directly to the meeting place

Create Emergency Supply Kits: Families, schools and workplaces should build supply kits. Home kits should be prepared for all family members and pets for at least three days and be portable in case of evacuation. Kits should include:

- Food and water
- Medicine and copies of prescriptions
- Personal hygiene items and first aid supplies
- Important documents, personal identification, copies of insurance, etc.
- Cash or travelers checks
- Other essential supplies (flashlights, extra batteries, blankets, seasonal clothing, cash, a battery operated or crank radio, a weather radio, cell phones and chargers) that your family or workplace may need

Make sure children understand the concept of “Stop, Drop and Roll” in case their clothing catches fire. Practice this until it is an instinct, since the normal reaction is to run which only increases the flames.

Prepare Your Home: *Take Protective Measures*

Outside the Home

- Place combustible items (outdoor furniture, etc.) in the garage, house or barn
- Seal up attic, vents and windows (if no storm shutters) with precut plywood to keep out sparks
- Connect garden hoses to outside taps and equip them with spray nozzle guns
 - Have enough hose to reach any area of the house and nearby out-buildings
- Turn off fuel supplies by closing the service valve at the tank or meter and extinguish all pilot lights

Inside the Home

- Close all windows and doors to prevent sparks from blowing inside and to prevent drafts
- Open fireplace dampers to stabilize pressure, but close fireplace screens to keep sparks from home interior
- Close blinds and heavy drapes to keep out heat and to provide safety in case heat or wind breaks windows
- Move flammable furniture away from windows and sliding doors to reduce the possibility of ignition
- Place valuable papers and memorabilia inside the car for quick departure
- Confine pets to one room so they can be easily located
- Back the car into the garage and roll up the windows
- Disconnect automatic garage door opener so you can still get the car out if a power failure occurs
- Keep your radio tuned to a local station for fire reports and evacuation information

During a Wildfire: *Evacuate*

- Evacuate all family members and pets who are not essential to preparing the home
 - Anyone with medical or physical limitations and the young and the elderly should be evacuated immediately

- Immediately evacuate when you are directed to by local authorities (elected officials, emergency managers, first responders)
- Leave doors and windows closed but unlocked
 - Firefighters may need to gain quick entry into your home to fight fire
 - Entire area will be isolated and patrolled by sheriff's deputies or police

Trapped at Home

- As the fire front approaches, go inside the house
 - You can survive inside
 - Fires often pass before homes burn down

Trapped in a Vehicle

- Firestorms are dangerous, stay in your vehicle until fire has passed
- Roll up windows, close air vents and drive slowly with headlights on
 - Do not drive through heavy smoke
- If you have to stop, avoid parking near foliage; turn off ignition and keep headlights on

Caught in the Open

- Take temporary shelter in a sparse fuel area
- If near a road, lie face down along the road cut or in the ditch on the uphill side
- Cover yourself with anything that will shield you from the fire's heat
- If hiking in the back country, seek a depression with sparse fuel and stay down until after the fire has passed

Information Sources:

www.eden.lsu.edu; www.fema.gov; www.ready.gov; www.redcross.org; www.fs.fed.us;
www.economics.noaa.gov

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