

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 outcomes by working together to do things like reduce combustible vegetation, harden homes and plan for wildfire. Volunteers can assist neighbors with extra support and participate in local efforts, like community cleanup days.

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BAND TOGETHER

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.

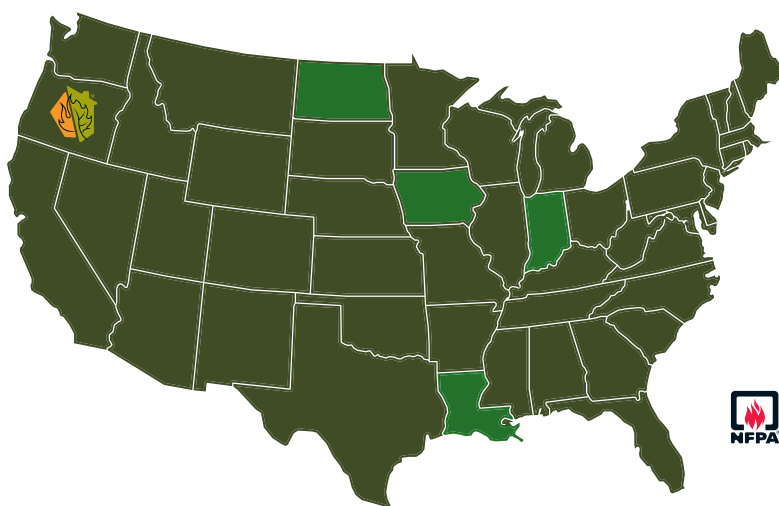
IN 2020 MORE THAN

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

42 STATES

1,536,365

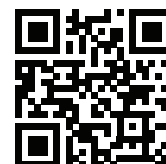
RESIDENTS LIVING IN FIREWISE COMMUNITIES



FIREWISE USA
Residents Reducing Wildfire Risks

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.



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:

IMMEDIATE ZONE 0-5'

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 maintenance for new homes and retrofits, especially with roofs, siding, and windows.

Preventative measures: Remove flammable debris, mulch, and plantings from roofs, eaves, gutters, deck and porch surfaces, within 5 feet of the home and any attachments.

INTERMEDIATE ZONE 5-30 FEET

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

Preventative measures: Keep lawns mowed and well-maintained with well-spaced plantings of fire-resistant species. Swap mulch for rocks, gravel, or stone. Remove large fuel packages, like firewood piles from this area.

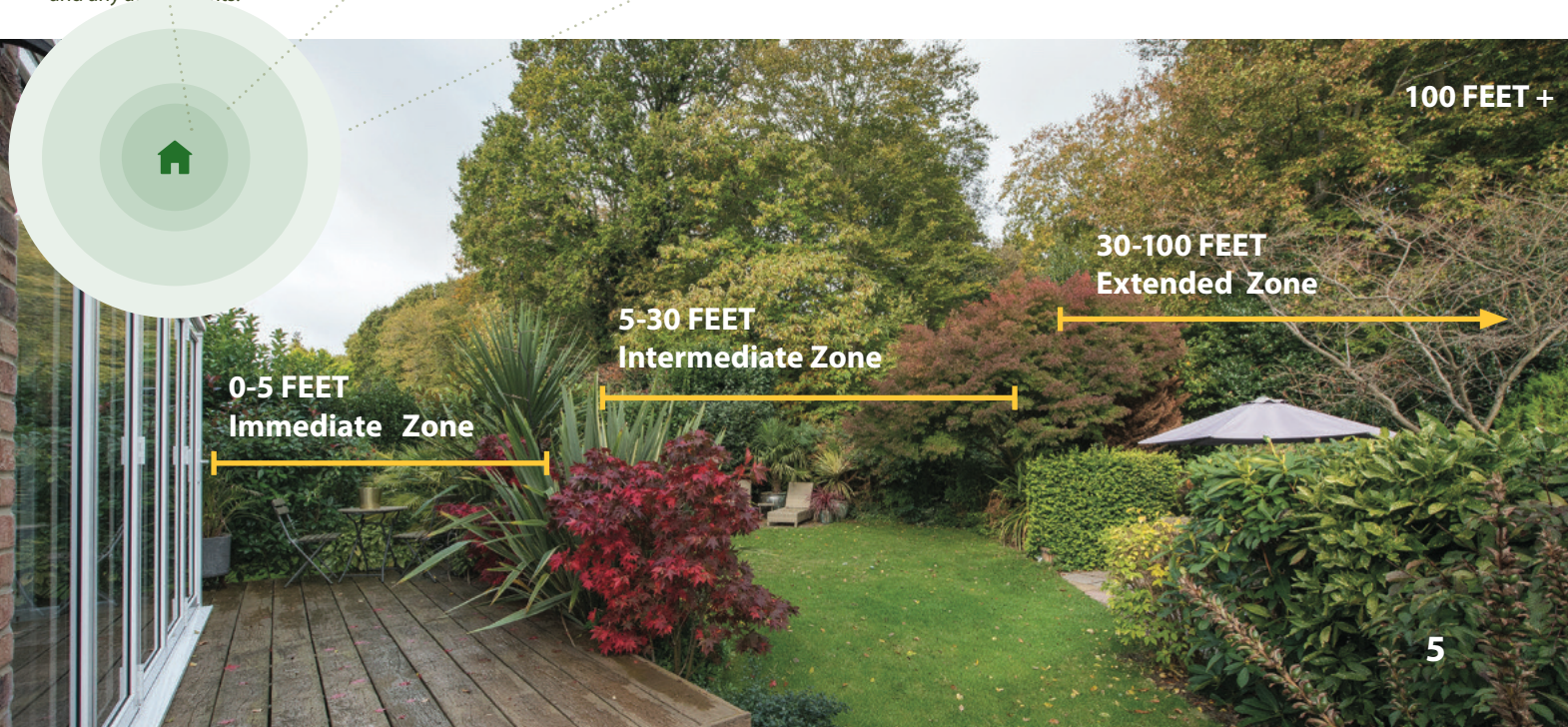
EXTENDED ZONE 30-100 FEET

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 and 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 to keep volume of vegetation fuel low.



FIREWISE USA® PARTICIPANTS KNOW THE VALUE OF HELPING NEIGHBORS

Firewise USA® provides up to date action oriented 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 has shown that taking simple scientifically proven steps can 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** combustible material such as needles and leaves from roof, gutters, eaves, porches and decks.
- ☐ **Replace** 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 1/8" or smaller to under eave and soffit vents.
- ☐ **Relocate** items kept under decks or porches; swap 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 dead vegetation.
- ☐ **Protect** and water dry grass and shrubs, trim brown vegetation and dispose of yard waste.
- ☐ **Prune** low hanging branches, 6-10' for taller trees or 1/3 the tree height for smaller trees. Remove tall grasses, vines and shrubs from under trees.
- ☐ **Contact** neighbors and create a plan to address shared wildfire safety concerns together.

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.



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.

WILDFIRES DESTROYED AN AVERAGE OF

7115 STRUCTURES
Annually from 2011-2023

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 insurance at apci.org/wildfire

Mountain View Estates in Talent OR was severely impacted in the Almeda Fire. In 2024, they became the first manufactured home park in the state to be recognised as a Firewise Community.



REDUCE FUEL THREATS TOGETHER

THREE BIGGEST WILDFIRE BEHAVIOR FACTORS

Topography: Lay of the land.

Weather: Wind speed, humidity and ambient temperature.

Fuel: Vegetation and manmade 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

Fuels 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 flammable materials within.



A burning home is a potential threat to surrounding homes and structures.



STEPS to Become a Nationally Recognized Firewise USA® Community

Form a Board or Committee

Gather residents and other applicable stakeholders to form a Firewise board or committee. This core group—led by one or two Resident Leaders—will collaborate with the Firewise Regional Coordinator(s) on identifying the site's risk reduction priorities. This group will develop a multi-year action plan based on the community risk assessment, along with overseeing completion of activities and reporting for the annual Firewise renewal.

Complete a Community Wildfire Risk Assessment

Conducting a community-wide wildfire risk assessment is the first step in becoming a nationally recognized Firewise USA® site. Your Firewise Regional Coordinator will work with your fire district and you to complete the risk assessment.

Create a 3-year Action Plan

Action plans are a prioritized list of risk reduction projects developed by the Firewise board or committee for their community. Plans include recommended home hardening and home ignition zone projects, community wildfire and emergency planning, educational activities, and outreach efforts that the site will strive to complete annually or over multiple years. Pictures of existing conditions in the community are required. Your Firewise Regional Coordinator can help you draft your plan.

Host a Community Meeting & Educational Outreach Events

Each participating site is required to have a minimum of one wildfire risk reduction educational event or related activity annually. This is an opportunity to call or go door to door to invite your neighbors to a community Firewise event. The first meeting counts, so you are already on your way to becoming Firewise!

Complete and Log Your Annual Wildfire Risk Reduction Investment

At a minimum, each site is required to invest the equivalent value of one volunteer hour per dwelling unit in risk reduction actions annually. A wide range of qualifying actions and expenditures (resident work, contractor costs, rental equipment, grants, etc.) count toward your overall yearly investment. Make sure to save your receipts and log your time!

Complete Your Firewise Application

Either the Resident Leader or the Firewise Regional Coordinator can begin the Firewise registration process by creating a site profile at: www.portal.firewise.org. The application is eligible for submission when the first annual investment is completed. Once submitted, the State Liaison at the Oregon Department of Forestry will approve applications, with final processing completed by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). You will then become a recognized Firewise USA® site and neighborhood signs will be sent to you!

WORK WITH A REGIONAL COORDINATOR 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. Your Firewise regional coordinator can help with this.

ORGANIZE IT

Your regional coordinator can help you enlist 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 to the site to contain a minimum of 8 dwelling units and a maximum of 2500. Then use the program portal to registrar. portal.firewise.org/user/login

PLAN IT

Your Regional Coordinator can work with the local Fire Dept. and you 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 least every five years.

The risk assessment is the basis for creating a **three year action plan** that identifies and prioritizes community wide efforts to be taken each year. Your Regional Coordinator can help you draft an action plan that may include overseeing local activities, events, mitigations, planning goals and homeowner education.

DO IT

Complete various 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 Community Cleanup Day. A longer list of examples are included in this booklet.

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 or Firewise regional coordinator submits their community to attain "In Good Standing Status" and **becomes a recognized Firewise USA site**. Each year, sites **renew their status by reporting their activity**.

TIME AND EXPENSE INVESTMENT EXAMPLES

Investing the equivalent of one volunteer hour (valued at \$31.80) per year in wildfire risk reduction efforts for each residential dwelling within the site's boundary is a requirement to remain "In Good Standing" of the national recognition program. Examples of eligible actions, activities, and expenses that can be used in meeting the total investment are listed below. Please note that this is not a comprehensive list, and provides only examples.

EDUCATION, OUTREACH & COORDINATION

Community engagement and education are critical components in reducing wildfire risk. Here are some examples of eligible activities that increase awareness, coordinate efforts, and provide training opportunities.

Collaboration with Forestry, Fire, and Nonprofit Experts:

- Consultation time with professionals to assess areas at risk.
- Individual home wildfire risk assessments conducted by certified assessors.
- Coordination of Projects and Meetings:
 - Outreach to neighbors via phone calls and door-to-door canvassing to engage new participants in risk reduction efforts.
 - Organizing Firewise meetings, workshops, or educational sessions with subject matter experts.
 - Program administration time by the Resident Leader, Firewise Committee, and Regional Firewise Coordinator.

Education/Training Events for Residents:

- Attendance at evacuation or preparedness trainings, wildfire education meetings, and informational workshops. *Note: Multiply the total number of attendees by the length of the meeting to calculate the number of hours invested.*
- Workshops focused on home hardening or fire-resistant landscaping practices.

HOME HARDENING

Structural improvements help homes withstand wildfire, minimizing potential ignition. "Home Hardening" can help your dwelling to withstand wildfire and includes a wide variety of improvements to the roof, gutters, eaves, windows, siding and venting, as well as the decks, fences, and outbuildings around a home. Eligible activities involve both volunteer and professional work that strengthens home defenses.

Structural Improvements and Maintenance Examples:

- Removal of all combustible materials from on the roof and in the gutters, and under decks and porches.
- Installation of ember-resistant materials, fine mesh screens on vents, soffit and eave enclosures, and chimney spark arrestors.
- Replacement of combustible building materials (wood siding, shingles, or fencing attached to the house) with fire-resistant alternatives (Class A roofs, concrete fiberboard, metal gutters, or triple-paned windows.)
- Regular maintenance such as clearing gutters, replacing roof shingles, or installing metal gutters.
- Installation of weatherstripping along the perimeter of doors, or sealing/caulking of siding and eaves to resist ember intrusion.

TIME AND EXPENSE INVESTMENT EXAMPLES

FUELS REDUCTION WITHIN THE HOME IGNITION ZONES

Reducing flammable materials around homes is essential in minimizing wildfire spread. These activities focus on clearing vegetation and creating defensible space.

Examples of Fuels Reduction Activities:

- Raking and removal of pine needles, leaves, and other combustible debris from the base of dwellings and fences
- Replacing combustible mulch or vegetation around homes with hardscaping alternatives such as river rock or gravel
- Delimbing and thinning of trees, removing ladder fuels, and replacing highly-combustible vegetation with fire-resistant species
- Maintaining a non-combustible footprint beneath decks and around propane tanks
- Relocating firewood piles to at least 30 feet from the home and other structures

COMMUNITY WILDFIRE & EVACUATION PLANNING

Preparedness at the community level is vital for effective response during wildfire events, and risk reduction activities undertaken by the entire community builds neighborhood cohesion. The following activities focus on planning, communication, and supporting vulnerable residents.

Examples of Community Planning and Preparedness:

- Creation and annual testing of community contact lists and phone trees
- Signing up residents for emergency notifications and wildfire phone apps
- Conducting tabletop or real-time evacuation drills with local fire departments
- Mapping and inventorying community risks and resources, and identifying vulnerable residents to enhance evacuation planning and provide local knowledge during incident response
- Participation in National Wildfire Community Preparedness Day projects—including planning group activities to maintain and remove debris from common areas, support residents physically unable to do the work of risk reduction
- Grant writing for wildfire risk reduction projects
- Mentoring other neighborhoods on the importance of reducing wildfire risks.

OTHER ELIGIBLE EXPENSES

To facilitate risk reduction efforts, many materials, services, and logistics-related costs are eligible for investment. These include equipment rentals, contractor expenses, and volunteer support.

Examples of Eligible Expenses:

- Rental or purchase of dumpsters, chippers, power equipment, hand tools, and safety gear for community clean-up days—including fuel and maintenance costs
- Contractor fees for professional services such as tree removal, fire-resistant home improvements, firesafe landscaping/hardscaping, or forestry consultation
- Supplies like compostable leaf bags, food for volunteer crews and community meetings, or costs associated with printing and distribution of educational materials.
- Mileage at the current IRS rate for attendance at wildfire meetings or to conduct risk-reduction work
- Value of hourly volunteer labor (from residents, youth groups and work programs, cub or girl scouts, students, etc.) and the associated materials required for them to support risk reduction projects in your Firewise USA® site.



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 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 wildfire, such as removing downed trees and dry vegetation, hardening homes, and creating the safe zone around your home.

COMMUNITY THROUGH COMMUNICATION. CAMARADERIE THROUGH COLLABORATION.

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.

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."

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 49'er 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."