

# STOPPING WILDFIRES

& Protecting Your Property



Photo by Chad Wittenberg

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The fire season is now a year-round reality in many areas, 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). 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 fire-safe practices. In addition, wildfire-related deaths occur because people wait too late to leave their homes.

Your 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 special section of *The Trumpet*, we hope to give you the tips and tools you need to prepare and be successful.

Wildfires, fueled by a build-up of dry vegetation and drive 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.

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.

# Plan now to prevent wildfires



# The Wildfire Problem in Kansas

Kansas has between 4,500 and 9,000 fires in vegetation a year. The amount of fires and acres burned in Kansas follows a multi-year cycle. While some years have less fires, they often build into much larger amounts the following year. The good news is that on average, 53% of all fires a year burn under one acre. The bad news is that high call volume tires out the members of the Fire Service, adds wear and tear to emergency vehicles, and even the smallest fires threaten structures and lives.

## Human Factors in Wildfire



Photo by Chad Wittenberg

Floating embers love tall, dry grass. This hazard isn't just for those who live in the country. If your city allows backyard burning, take a look at vegetation growing close to your house, too.



Photo by Andover Fire Department

Inappropriate burning practices often lead to fire spread. Easy preparation tips can prevent this problem.



Photo by Chad Wittenberg

Small controlled burns quickly get out of control with poor planning and management.

Most fires are completely preventable. Roughly 3% of fires are attributed to fully natural causes such as lightning, high wind knocking lines down, and animals. The largest amount of fires are started by "controlled" or planned fires which either rekindled or spread out of control. These fires could have started out as simple backyard fire pits for entertaining or burning a pile of dead leaves and limbs after cleaning up a yard. Floating embers can quickly spread to dry, overgrown vegetation and shifting winds can push heat and flames where people never meant for them to go.

## Wildfire effects are closer to home than you may realize



Photo by Kickapoo Fire Department

Fire won't stop at the fence line. Even for those who don't plan on burning, preparing for wildfire is important. Your neighbor's fire can become your own.



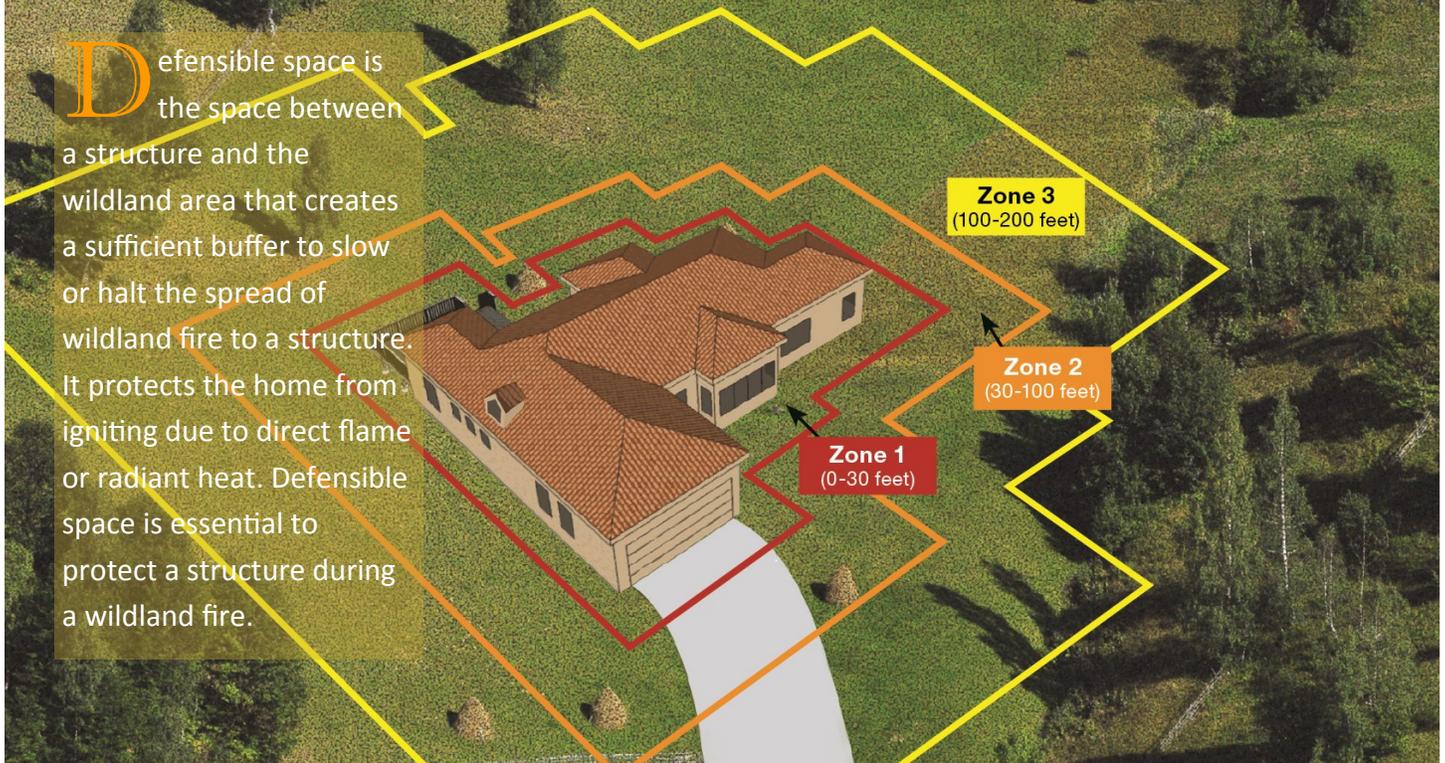
A dozen fire departments worked a 1,500 acre fire with multiple structures in harm's way. No one was left to respond to 4 other grass fires.



Multiple grass fires left only one firefighter to fight a greenhouse fire. Strained resources increase response times and more danger for all calls.

# Create Defensible Space

**D**efensible space is the space between a structure and the wildland area that creates a sufficient buffer to slow or halt the spread of wildland fire to a structure. It protects the home from igniting due to direct flame or radiant heat. Defensible space is essential to protect a structure during a wildland fire.



## ZONE 1

### 0-30 feet around your home or to property line

- ◆ Use hard surfaces such as concrete or noncombustible rock mulch 0-5 feet around home.
- ◆ Use non-woody, low growing herbaceous vegetation. Succulent plants and ground covers are good choices.
- ◆ Store firewood and other combustible materials at least 30 feet away from your home, garage or attached deck.
- ◆ Trim back touching or overhanging branches from the roof to a distance of at least 10 feet.

## ZONE 2

### 30-100 feet around your home or to property line

- ◆ Create vegetation groups, "islands," to break up continuous fuels around your home.
- ◆ Remove ladder fuels (those which allow fire to climb from the surface level into upper portions of trees).
- ◆ Remove leaf and needle debris from the yard.
- ◆ Keep grass and wildflowers under 8" in height.

## ZONE 3

### 100-200 feet around your home or to property line

- ◆ Create and maintain a minimum of 10 feet between the tops of trees.
- ◆ Remove ladder fuels, creating a separation between low-level vegetation and tree branches to keep fire from climbing up trees.
- ◆ Remove dead trees and shrubs.

# Actions You Can Take Today

Preparing for a fire isn't just for living in rural communities. It's for anybody. Remember those 53% of fires that were smaller than one acre? Most of them were in backyards in cities. Even if you don't plan to burn leaves or have a backyard fire pit, fire spread can happen anyway. Use these easy tips to protect yourself from not only spreading wildfires but structure fires as well. The same principles will keep your property and your family safe.



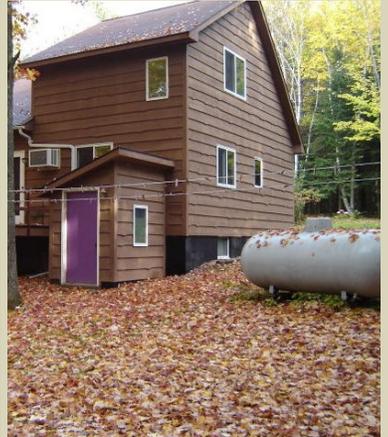
Weed around the property regularly, especially areas that a lawn mower is not appropriate for (tall dry grasses, rocky terrain, etc.)



Remove leaf litter and other debris that accumulate around the building, under vegetation, and other collection areas.



Clean out leaves and other debris from guttering.



Remove leaf litter, straw and other debris from under and around propane tanks to create 10 feet of clearance around it.



Eliminate ladder fuels by pruning tree branches on trees around the property to within at least 6 feet of the ground.



Remove flammable materials from underneath the house, decks and porches. Common flammables include scrap-wood, firewood and combustible furniture.



Mow the lawn regularly to keep grasses shorter than 4 inches tall around the home. Never mow in dry vegetation.

# Residential Safety Checklist



## Defensible Space

**YES** **NO**

1. Is dead vegetation cleared to the recommended defensible space area? (Consider adding distance due to slope of property.)
2. Is there separation between shrubs?
3. Are ladder fuels removed?
4. Is there a clean and green area extending at least 30 feet from the house?
5. Is there a non-combustible area within five feet of the house?
6. Is there separation between trees and crowns?

## Emergency Access

**YES** **NO**

1. Is the street 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. Is flammable vegetation within 10 feet of the driveway cleared?
5. If a long driveway is present, does it have a suitable turnaround area?

## Home

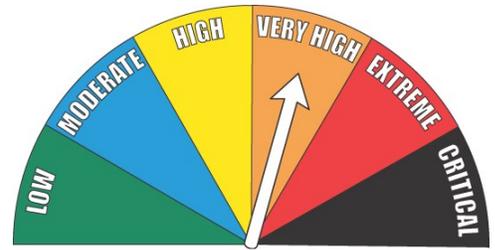
**YES** **NO**

1. Does your home have a metal, composition or tile roof with capped ends and covered fascia?
2. Are the rain gutters and roof free of leaves, needles and branches?
3. Are all vent openings screened with 1/8" (or smaller) mesh metal screen?
4. Are approved spark arrestors on chimneys?
5. Does the house have non-combustible siding?
6. Are the eaves "boxed in" and the decks enclosed?
7. Are the windows made of at least double-paned or tempered glass?
8. Are the decks, porches, and other similar areas made of non-combustible material and free of easily combustible material?
9. Is all firewood at least 30 feet from the house?

# My Personal Wildfire Action Plan

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.

During High Fire Danger days in your area, monitor your local media for information on wildfires and be ready to implement your plan. Hot, dry and windy conditions create the perfect environment for a wildfire.



Important Phone Numbers:

Out of state Contact: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Work: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

County Emergency Communication Center: \_\_\_\_\_

Fire Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Sheriff's Department: \_\_\_\_\_



Evacuation Route:

\_\_\_\_\_

Where to go: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Location of emergency supply kit: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Hot Links for More Information

[State Fire Marshal Wildfire Prevention Information](#)    [Wildfire Today](#)

[Kansas Forestry Division](#)

[Kansas Flint Hills Smoke Management](#)

A photograph of a wildfire. In the foreground, there is a field of dry, golden-brown grass. A fire is burning in the middle ground, with bright orange and yellow flames. A large, dark plume of smoke rises from the fire, filling the upper half of the frame. The sky is a deep blue with some lighter, wispy clouds. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

**Thank you to  
Chad Wittenberg  
for contributing  
his amazing  
fire photos.**