



*Developing evacuation plans before a wildfire threatens allows residents to leave at a moment's notice.*

# SURVIVE THE UNTHINKABLE if wildfire threatens your home

## No-nonsense recommendations to reduce property damage, threat to life

*By Nick Williams*

Wildfires are likely a concern in our state this summer with the relatively dry winter and so much beetle-killed timber in the mountain ranges.

We hope no one experiences wildfire and its aftermath but being prepared provides the best chance to minimize the effects of wildfire. We offer the following to help prepare.

### **Before Wildfire Season Hits Your Property**

Follow three steps to ensure safety:

#### **Ready – Preparing for the fire threat.**

Be ready, be firewise, and create defensible space (more information is at the “Wildfire” section

of [barnyardsandbackyards.com](http://barnyardsandbackyards.com)).

Prepare before the threat of a wildfire so you, other family members, and the house are ready. Assemble emergency supplies and belongings in a safe spot. Make sure everyone living within the home is familiar with the escape plan; set routes. Ask the local fire department if your county has a reverse 911 service and how to join. This service will contact your phone number in the event of a major incident in the area.

#### **Set – Situational awareness when a fire starts.**

If a wildfire breaks out near your area, pack emergency items in your vehicle. Listen to the latest news from the media and local fire

department either by AM/FM radio, local TV, or talking with authorities on scene. Prepare domestic animals and livestock for the possibility of evacuation. Livestock trailers should be pre-positioned to capture and transport large animals before the fire arrives. Do not rely on phones or TV as the sole means of obtaining information. Power and phone lines can go down, and cell phone towers can quickly become overloaded in large incidents and wildfires. It is your responsibility to know when and how to go.

#### **Go – Leave early!**

With a plan in place, you are prepared to leave at a moment's notice. Evacuations take a lot of time and people to accomplish. You can help

by leaving as soon as possible in the event of an evacuation. With your family safely out of the area, firefighters are freed to fight the fire most efficiently. Do not return home unless given permission.

### **Before a Wildfire**

If you see a wildfire, call 911. Don't assume someone else already has. Have a disaster kit (see story at right) and emergency plan ready.

### **Well Before the Fire Approaches Your House**

- Immediately evacuate pets, the young, and anyone with medical or physical limitations.
- Wear protective clothing made of cotton that covers exposed skin. Do not wear nylon or similar fabrics.
- Clear flammable items from around the house, including woodpiles, lawn furniture, barbecue grills, tarp coverings, etc. Move them at least 30 feet from the area around the home.
- Close and protect openings. Close all doors inside the house to prevent drafts. Open the damper on a fireplace but close the fireplace screen. Close outside attic, eave, and basement vents, windows, doors, pet doors, etc. Remove flammable drapes and curtains. Close all shutters, blinds, or heavy, non-combustible window coverings to reduce radiant heat.
- Shut off any natural gas, propane, or fuel oil supplies at the source.
- Connect garden hoses and fill any pools, hot tubs, garbage

# DISASTER KIT

Disasters can happen anytime and anywhere. There may not be much time to respond. The Red Cross recommends assembling an emergency kit. Once disaster hits, there is no time to shop or search for supplies. If supplies are gathered in advance, families can endure an evacuation or home confinement.

Place the supplies most likely needed for an evacuation in an easy-to-carry container or bag. Make sure these supplies are in an easily accessible place and everyone in the family knows where it is.

There are six basics to stock.

### **Water**

Store a minimum of 1 gallon per person per day for drinking and sanitation purposes. Store a three-day supply. Store water in plastic containers.

### **Food**

Store at least a three-day supply of ready-to-eat canned food. Select foods that require no refrigeration, preparation, or cooking, and little or no water. If food must be heated, pack a can of Sterno. Don't forget to store food and water for your pet if you have one!

### **First Aid Kits**

You should have two: one for the home and one for the car. Both should include:

- sterile adhesive bandages in assorted sizes
- assorted sizes of safety pins
- soap
- latex gloves
- sterile gauze pads of various sizes
- various sizes of bandages
- scissors
- tweezers

- needles
- moist towelettes
- antiseptic
- thermometer

### **Special Items**

- **For babies:** formula, diapers, bottles, powdered milk, medications
- **For older adults:** Heart and high blood pressure medication, insulin, prescription drugs, denture needs, contact lenses and supplies, extra eyeglasses
- **Entertainment:** Games and books

### **Important family documents**

Keep these in a waterproof, portable container:

- Wills, insurance policies, contracts, deeds, stocks and bonds
- Passports, social security cards, immunization records
- Bank account numbers
- Credit card account numbers and companies
- Inventory of valuable household goods, important telephone numbers
- Family records (birth, marriage, death certificates)

### **A few things to remember**

- Keep items in airtight plastic bags.
- Change your stored water supply every six months so it stays fresh.
- Replace your stored food every six months.
- Re-think your kit and family needs at least once a year.
- Ask your physician or pharmacist about storing prescription medications.





*Do not get yourself in these situations – stay informed and leave early!*

cans, tubs, or other large containers with water. Firefighters may take advantage of these resources if near your home.

- Back your car into the driveway and roll up the windows.
- Disconnect any automatic garage door openers so doors can still be opened by hand if the power fails. Close all garage doors.
- Place valuable papers, mementos, and anything you can't live without inside the car, ready for quick departure. Any remaining pets should also be put in the car.

### Preparing to Leave

- Turn on outside lights and leave a light on in every room to make the house more visible in heavy smoke.
- Leave doors and windows closed but unlocked. It may be necessary for firefighters to gain quick entry into a home to fight fire. The entire area will be isolated and patrolled by sheriff's deputies or police after the fire moves on.

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### During a Wildfire

#### Survival in a Vehicle

- This is dangerous and should only be done in an emergency, but surviving a firestorm is possible if you stay in a car. It is much less dangerous than trying to run from a fire on foot.
- Roll up windows and close air vents. Drive slowly with headlights on. Watch for other vehicles and pedestrians. Do not drive through heavy smoke.
- If you have to stop, park away from the heaviest trees and brush. Turn headlights on and ignition off. Roll up windows and close air vents.
- Get on the floor and cover up with a blanket or coat.
- Stay in the vehicle until the main fire passes. Do not drive – the engine may stall and not restart. Air currents may rock the car, and some smoke and sparks may enter the vehicle. Temperature inside will increase, but metal gas tanks and containers rarely explode.

### If Caught in the Open

- The best temporary shelter is in a sparse fuel area. Some examples would be a plowed field, large paved or gravel car parking area, or an irrigated lawn or field.
- If a road is nearby, lie face down along the road cut or in the ditch on the uphill side. Cover yourself with anything for protection from the fire's heat.
- If hiking in the back country, seek a depression with sparse fuel. Clear fuel away from the area while the fire is approaching and then lay face down in the depression and cover yourself. Stay down until the fire passes.

### After a Wildfire

- When allowed to return, immediately check the roofs of all buildings. If any heat or fire still exists, contact 911 and emergency services first. If safe and possible, extinguish any roof fires, sparks, or embers. Check the attic for hidden burning embers.
- The water in the pool or hot tub and other containers can come in handy now if needed to apply water to embers or heat on or around the house.
- For several hours after the fire, maintain a fire watch. Re-check for smoke and sparks throughout the house.

### To Learn More:

- <http://www.ready.gov/>
- Information from the International Association of Fire Chiefs program "Ready, Set, GO!; Your personal Wildland Fire Action Guide." See <http://bit.ly/I0vKtc>.
- Firewise Wyoming at <http://www.firewisewyoming.com/index.html>

# HAVE A PLAN

## Creating an emergency plan

- Find out what disasters could occur in your community. Do you live in a flood zone or a wildfire-prone area? Learn about what you would do in different disasters.
- Your local government and local Red Cross chapter should have details on evacuation routes. Learn the emergency signals and discuss them with your family.
- Determine the best ways to leave the home and the best ways to escape disaster in your neighborhood or town.
- If loved ones cannot be met inside the home, determine a meeting place in the neighborhood. Also consider choosing a secondary meeting location outside of the neighborhood or community in case meeting near your home isn't possible.
- Check disaster plans at schools, day cares, work, and places where you and your family tend to spend time in the community. Try to coordinate the evacuation procedures at each place to ensure everyone will be able to reach each other or end up on the same side of town.
- It's not a bad idea to have a Plan A, a Plan B, and a Plan C. Whatever the plans are, make sure everyone in the family knows about them and what to do in different scenarios.
- Calling long distance during disasters may be easier since cell phone lines and local telephone networks may be down or overwhelmed. Be sure to have an out-of-town emergency contact.
- After a disaster, services or aid might not arrive for days. You might even have to flee your home or you might not be able to get to your house. In such cases, it will help to have a few things handy. Make a disaster kit for your home and car, along with a portable one. See list page 21.
- Don't forget to think about how to care for pets during an emergency. Many shelters may not allow them inside because of health laws. Make sure to prepare pets for the worst.
- This is all a lot to remember. Write down your family's plans and emergency contact numbers and give everyone copies.