

### Wildfire Safety

Each year according to a National Fire Protection Association study (2011-2016) fire departments respond to over 306,000 wildfires each year. Only 30,600 of these are forest or woodland fires. The remaining 275,400 are grass wildfires initially responded to by private landowners with the assistance of trained volunteer fire departments. 59.5% of all wildfire injuries happen on these grass fires. Landowners first tendency is to stop the fire from burning additional resources.



### “The Brown” versus “The Black”

Although many agriculture producers served as trained volunteer firefighters, many of the injuries stem from producers not having the right training, not having the right equipment, and not having the right approach.

Trained Wildland Firefighters who have completed S130/190 Wildfire Behavior Training know that the safest approach to a fast moving wild grass fire is to drive across it on the burned area (“the black”) and start snuffing it out. This leaves a wide safety area and retreat area behind you if the wind changes.

Getting in front of a wildfire and working it from the fuel side (“the brown”) places you in the heat, standing in fuel,

and exposed to chemicals on the wind. In addition many grassland fires can generate from 30” to 30’ tall flames roaring at you and often throwing embers over your head to start fires behind you without your knowledge.

### Equipment

Agriculture producers without formal training usually have clothing and equipment which is not fire or heat resistant. Vehicles can have fuel and lubricant seepage which can ignite. Agriculture sprayers are often designed to put out 1 -3 gallons per minute while fire sprayers are calibrated at 25-50 gallons per minute.

### Firelines

Firefighters, specifically with advanced training, will move distant in advance of a fire and create firebreaks with equipment or hand tools. They know better than to try and combat fire advancement at the fire line. In addition, highly trained technicians can then initiate a back burn to reduce fuel in front of the fire. Starting a backfire sounds practical but when the two fires meet flames, debris and air can shoot upwards as much as 4 times the flame wall height. Some may jump the line.

### Fitness

Wildland Firefighters (those with Red Cards) have to maintain a heightened level of fitness which is often tested by requiring them to carry 65 pounds over 3 miles of rough terrain on a regular basis. Ranchers and farmers respond to fires despite their condition and health status. Their livelihood is on fire.

### Communication

Firefighters have predetermined radio frequencies so they can call up additional resources and specialties if needed. Rangeland wildfires sometimes compromise cell towers.

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### Emergency Equipment

In addition to lacking the Nomex clothing, fireproof gloves, particulate masks, fire helmets and fire boots used by Wildland Firefighters, agriculture producers almost always have no alternatives if a fire turns and “burns over” them.

Although an undesirable option, Wildland Firefighters carry a “Fire Shelter” on their gear which can be deployed as an emergency wrap-around bivouac bag which can protect them from direct fire and heat for several minutes as the fire passes.



### General Fire Recommendations for Agriculture Producers

The following are options a producer can implement to reduce the impacts of wildfire on your operation:

- Have contact information for your local fire department.
- Take a wildfire orientation and training course.
- Keep your health and fitness in a ready state.
- Make a plan to respond with others to wildfire.
- Purchase communication equipment which is not cell dependent.

- Purchase, fill and maintain a fire fighting apparatus at your farm or ranch during fire “season”.
- Understand the risks associated with weather including lightning, wind and storms.
- Know where man-made ignitions may occur near your operation.
- Invest in some fire-resistant clothing.
- Never take vehicles which leak fuel or lubricant near a fire.
- Create fire “breaks” around important buildings and sites.
- Consider widening existing fire breaks such as county roads by practicing targeted grazing to reduce standing fuel loads.
- Let fire departments know where those breaks are.
- Control annual weedy grasses such as Downey Bromegrass, Ripgut Bromegrass and forby weeds such as Russian Thistle which can not only serve as fuel but can roll spreading fire if it starts.
- Practice rotation tillage in windward sides of cash crops in a wide enough pattern to inhibit fire passage.
- Thin and manage woody species for healthy density and vigor to resist fire.
- Have escape corridors for both livestock and you.
- Last and most important, fight fires from the black with the right equipment, careful attitude and friends!

More information is available by contacting your local Extension office or the Extension Disaster Education Network at [www.extensiondisaster.net](http://www.extensiondisaster.net)—Stay Safe!

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