



## A guide to Firewise principles

THE FIREWISE COMMUNITIES PROGRAM provides homeowners with simple and easy steps to help reduce a home's wildfire risk by preparing ahead of a wildfire. These steps are rooted in principles based on solid fire science research into how homes ignite. The research comes from the world's leading fire experts whose experiments, models and data collection are based on some of the country's worst wildland fire disasters.

Below are Firewise principles and tips that serve as a guide for residents:

**When it comes to wildfire risk, it is not a geographical location, but a set of conditions that determine the home's ignition potential in any community.**

Wildfire behavior is influenced by three main factors: topography (lie of the land), weather (wind speed, relative humidity and ambient temperature) and fuel (vegetation and man-made structures). In the event of extreme wildfire behavior, extreme weather conditions are normally

present, like extended drought, high winds, low humidity and high temperatures, coupled with excess fuel build up including the accumulation of live and dead vegetation material. Additionally, the inherent lie of the land influences the intensity and spread a fire takes. Fires tend to move upslope, and the steeper the slope the faster it moves.

Of these three factors, **fuel** is the one we can influence.

Debris like dead leaves and pine needles left on decks, in gutters and strewn across lawns can ignite from flying embers. Fire moving along the ground's surface can "ladder" into shrubs and low hanging tree limbs to create longer flames and more heat. If your home has flammable features or vulnerable openings, it can also serve as fuel for the fire, and become part of a disastrous chain of ignitions to other surrounding homes and structures.

**A home's ignition risk is determined by its immediate surroundings or its "home ignition zone" and the home's construction materials.**

According to fire science research and case studies, it's not where a home is located that necessarily determines ignition risk, but the landscape around it, often referred to as the "home ignition zone." The home ignition zone is defined as the home and its immediate surroundings up to 200 feet (60 m).

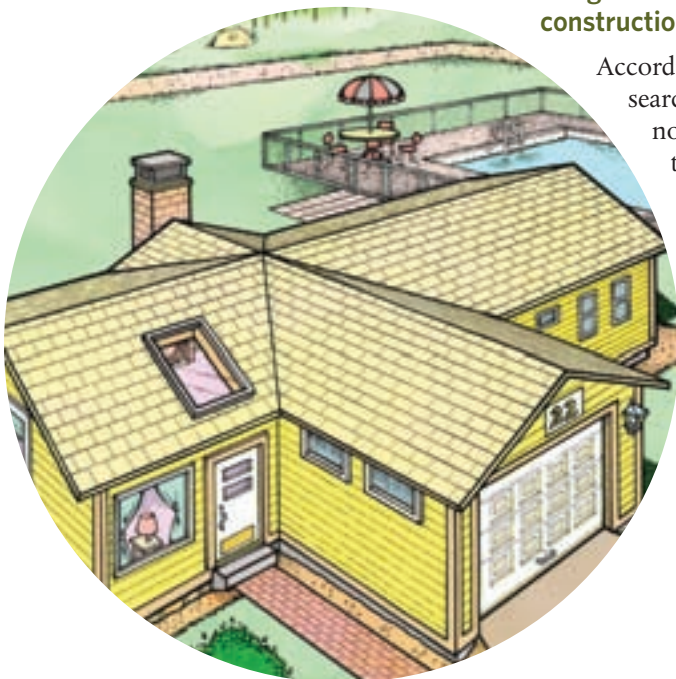
The Firewise Communities Program provides tips for reducing wildfire risk based on the home ignition zone concept:

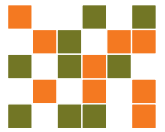
**Home Zone:** Harden your home against wildfire. This includes fences, decks, porches and other attachments. From the point of view of a fire, if it's attached to the house it is a part of the house. Non-flammable or low flammability construction materials—especially for roofs, siding and windows—are recommended for new homes or retrofits. Keep any flammables, including plantings and mulch out of the area within 5 feet of your home's perimeter.

**Zone 1:** This well-irrigated area encircles the structure for at least 30 feet on all sides including decks and fences, and provides space for fire suppression equipment in the event of an emergency. Lawns should be well maintained and mowed. Plantings should be limited to carefully-spaced low flammability species. In particularly fire prone areas, non-flammable mulch should be considered.

**Zone 2:** This area encircles 30 - 100 feet from the home. Low flammability plant materials should be used here. Plants should be low-growing and the irrigation system should extend into this section. Shrubs and trees should be limbed up and spaced to prevent crowns of trees from touching.

**Zone 3:** This area encompasses 100 - 200 feet from the home. Place low-growing plants and well-spaced trees in this area, remembering to keep the volume of vegetation (fuel) low.





**Zone 4:** This furthest zone from the structure is a natural area. Selectively prune and thin all plants and remove highly flammable vegetation.

### Homeowners can and must take primary responsibility for wildfire safety action around the home.

There are not enough fire fighting resources to protect every house during severe wildfires, and with shrinking budgets it means we need to do more with less. Fire fighters are trained to safely and efficiently suppress wildland fires, but their effectiveness is reduced when they must sweep decks, move wood piles and patio furniture while trying to fight a fire. According to fire science research, individual efforts do make a difference even in the face of a catastrophic wildfire.

The following steps are outlined by the Firewise program to reduce home ignition risk, based on this principle:

- Prune low hanging limbs to reduce ladder fuels
- Clean roofs and gutters of pine needles and dead leaves
- Keep flammable plants and mulches at least 5 feet away from your home's perimeter
- Use low-growing, well pruned and fire-resistant plants around home
- Screen or box-in areas below patios and decks with wire screening no larger than 1/8-inch mesh
- Sweep decks and porches clear of fallen leaves
- Move woodpiles away from the home during non-winter months
- Bring doormats and furniture cushions inside when an area is threatened by a wildfire

- Close garage doors when leaving your home in the event of an evacuation

### We all have a role to play in protecting ourselves and others.

Your home ignition zone extends up to 200 feet—and it's quite common to have neighbors whose home ignition zone overlaps yours. Buildings closer than 100 feet apart can ignite one another if they are in flames. In addition, many communities have commonly owned property, including natural or wooded areas that can pose fire risks to all. This means that to be most effective, neighbors need to work together and with their local fire service to achieve greater wildfire safety.

Together, community residents can work with agencies and elected officials to accomplish the following:

- Ensure that homes and neighborhoods have legible/clearly marked street names and numbers
- Create "two ways out" of the neighborhood for safe evacuation during a wildfire emergency
- Create phone trees to alert residents about an impending fire
- Review any existing community rules or regulations on vegetation management and construction materials to see if they are "Firewise-friendly"
- Use the "Ready, Set, Go!" program with the fire department to educate neighbors
- Use the Firewise Communities/USA® Recognition Program to create and implement an ongoing action plan that will also earn the neighborhood national recognition for their efforts

**LEARN MORE** about how to keep families safe and reduce homeowners' risk for wildfire damage at [www.firewise.org](http://www.firewise.org).

**ADDITIONALLY,** complimentary brochures, booklets, pamphlets, videos and much more can be found on the information and resources page of the website and ordered online through the Firewise catalog.

