My Personal WILDFIRE ACTION GUIDE



AUSTIN WILDFIRE COALITION

TRAVIS COUNTY

READY, SET, GO!™

10th Edition

Ready, Set, Go!


Photo credit: AFD Wildfire

Saving Lives and Property through Advanced Planning and Action

This publication was prepared by the RSG Program with the assistance of the City of Austin and Travis County in cooperation with the International Association of Fire Chiefs; The U.S. Forest Service; U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management; and the U.S. Fire Administration.

To learn more about the Ready, Set, Go! Program and its partners, visit:

www.wildlandfireRSG.org

Verify compliance with rules and regulations of your local government and homeowner associations prior to modifying structures or clearing property.

Make sure you know your property boundaries before clearing vegetation. Clearing vegetation on property that does not belong to you could result in criminal violations or civil law suits.

2021 edition 10

Cover photo credit: Jim Nix (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

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The wildfire season is a year-round reality in the United States. This strains firefighting resources and emphasizes the need for residents to be proactive and prepared for the threat of wildfire.

Central Texas was placed on the worldwide map as a wildfire prone area with the advent of the 2011 Labor Day fires. In the wake of those devastating fires, which resulted in the loss of many homes, neighbors put in the work to prepare for future threats. Recently, that home hardening effort was tested when the Rolling Pines fire burned 800 acres in nearly the same Bastrop area ravaged by wildfire ten years before. First responders took note of the difference in outcome – zero homes were lost. The leadership of the Austin/Travis County area organized this Action Guide to provide you with the tips and tools you need to prepare for a wildfire threat, have situational awareness when a fire starts, and leave early.

Wildfire is and always has been a natural occurrence. Hills, canyons, grasslands, and forests burn periodically as part of a healthy ecosystem. Wildfires are fueled by dry vegetation, driven by increasing seasonal temperatures, and fanned by dry winds. Wildfires have become increasingly dangerous with the inclusion of built environments in the wildland urban interface (WUI), an area or zone where human development meets or mixes with natural vegetation.

Studies show as many as 80 percent of homes lost to wildfires could have been saved if their owners had followed simple risk-reduction practices. In addition, wildfire related deaths can occur because people wait too long to leave their homes.

Proactive mitigation on your property and safe early evacuation can help protect you, your household, and your property. This Action Guide provides tips and tools you need to prepare for wildfire threats, gain situational awareness when a fire starts, and act early as directed by local officials.

Austin and Travis County fire departments take every precaution to help protect you and your property from wildfire. Many wildland managers, including the City of Austin and Travis County, also work to reduce wildfire risk by creating shaded fuel breaks and conducting prescribed burns where appropriate. However, in a major wildfire event, there simply may not be enough fire resources or firefighters to defend every home. These wildfires can directly threaten lives, houses, water supplies, utilities, recreation resources, cultural icons, endangered species, commerce, and transportation systems. As people continue to build houses in high-risk areas, the danger only increases.

Successfully preparing for a wildfire enables you to take personal responsibility to protect yourself, your family, and your property. Remember, all efforts to improve defensible space on your property can decrease property damage and help firefighters with suppression efforts.

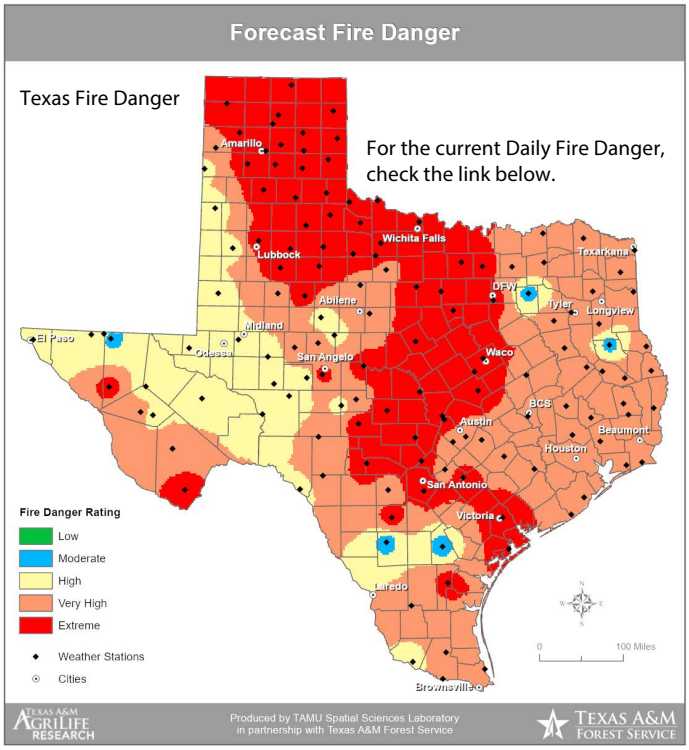
The Ready, Set, Go (RSG)! program works in collaboration with existing, local wildfire public education efforts and amplifies the common goal of wildfire preparedness. It is not a question of if, but when, the next major wildfire will occur. Use this Action Guide to help you become wildfire ready!

Visit us at www.wildfirecoalition.org to learn more about being prepared.

Ready begins with property owners taking action.


Wind-blown ember igniting a house.

Photo credit: IBHS





NFDRS Sign

Photo credit: AFD

Defensible Space and Fire-Resistant Landscaping Can Protect Your Home

If you live next to or within one and a half miles of a densely vegetated area or the WUI, you should provide defensible space to better protect your home. This will create a safer area for firefighters to operate if they have the capacity to defend your home. Creating a buffer zone on your poperty by removing weeds, dried grass, brush, and other vegetation helps keep the fire away from your home and reduces the risk of ignition from flying embers.

Homes near the Wildland Boundary

If your home is within one and a half miles of a natural area, it may be considered part of an ember zone. Keep in mind, embers can destroy homes and neighborhoods or even natural wildlands far from the actual front of the fire. Use the information in this Guide to help you prepare your property.

Consider This

Unmanaged and overgrown vegetation between and around homes increases the risk of wildfire spreading throughout the community and endangering lives and property. Pre-fire planning through mitigation and vegetation management allows firefighters the ability to safely fight wildfires. The work you complete today may save your home and protect a firefighter tomorrow.

Ember Zone

An ember is a small, glowing fragment from a wildfire that is carried by the wind. Embers are light enough to travel long distances and are the primary reason homes ignite, often at significant distances from the actual flame front of a wildfire. Embers ignite materials on and around the home. Embers travel inside your home through vents, windows, and other openings.

Texas Fire Danger

Fire danger consists of the various factors of fuels, weather, topography and risk combined to assess the daily fire potential on an area. Fire danger is "the resultant descriptor of the combination of both constant and variable factors which affect the initiation, spread and difficulty of control of wildfires on an area." The Texas Fire Danger Map is a real-time mapping project designed to display current and forecasted fire danger levels throughout Texas. Weather information is provided by remote, automated weather stations Fire danger maps are produced daily.
https://tfsweb.tamu.edu/DailyFireDanger

Red Flag Warning

A Red Flag Warning is issued by the National Weather Service when low humidity, warm temperatures, dry fuels, and strong winds could combine to produce extreme fire behavior. Fires occurring during a Red Flag day can be very dangerous and spread rapidly. You should always follow the instructions provided by your local emergency response organizations and be prepared to take immediate action.
www.iafc.org/docs/default-source/pdf/red-flag-resource-long-.pdf

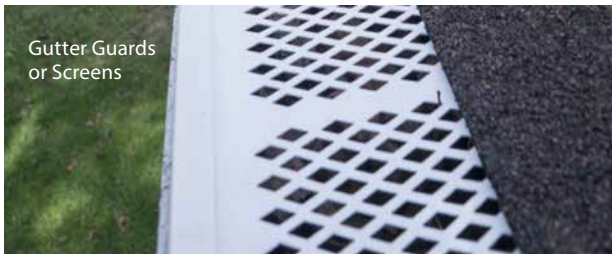
Ready Make Your Home Fire Resistant - **Harden Your Home**

Construction materials and the quality of the defensible space surrounding the structure are what increases the chance of survival in a wildfire. Embers from a wildfire will find the weak spot in your home's fire protection scheme and can easily lodge in small, overlooked, or seemingly inconsequential areas. Look at where fallen leaves form piles on your roof and deck and around your home - these are the areas where embers will collect. Below are some home hardening measures you can take to safeguard your home.


Fire Resistant Deck Materials

Balconies and Decks

Construct your balconies or decks with **noncombustible materials**, and do not store combustible items underneath them. If there is a fire threat, bring any **furniture** into your home. Embers can collect in or on combustible surfaces, or beneath decks and balconies, igniting the material and giving a path for the fire to enter your home. **Remove oak leaves, vines, grasses**, or any other flammable materials from underneath or on your deck. Any wood framed decks should be skirted from the bottom of the deck to the ground.


Gutter Guards or Screens

Roofs

Roofs are vulnerable to embers that become lodged and can start a fire, especially anywhere on the roof with litter buildup. **Roof valleys**, open ends of **barrel tiles**, and **rain gutters** are all points of entry. Block off all open spaces, and regularly inspect these areas. Remove any leaves and debris. Use a Class A fire-rated roof covering, such as composition shingles, metal or tile. Block any spaces between roof decking by using a noncombustible underlayment covering to minimize ember intrusion.


Enclosed Eaves

Eaves

Embers can gather under open eaves and ignite combustible material. Enclose your eaves with **noncombustible or ignition-resistant materials** to prevent ember intrusion, and regularly clear away debris that collects here.


Screened Vents

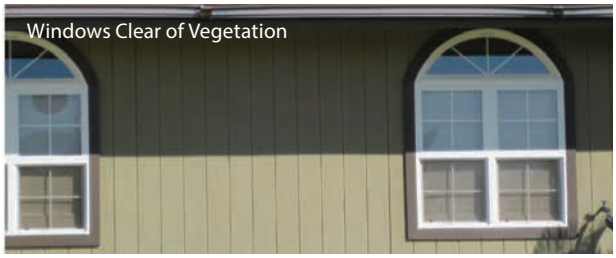
Vents

Embers can enter the attic or other concealed spaces and ignite combustible materials through open and unscreened vents. Vents in eaves, gables and cornices are particularly vulnerable if not properly screened with wire mesh. Use 1/8-inch **corrosion resistant metal mesh** (hardware cloth)to screen all vents, and check them regularly to remove any debris that collects on the screen.


Noncombustible Fencing

Walls and Fencing

Combustible siding or fencing provides surfaces and crevices for embers to nestle and ignite. Ensure wooden fences do not connect directly to the house. Create a **break in the fence** of at least 5 feet by using a metal gate or noncombustible substitute to connect to the house. Build or remodel with **noncombustible or ignition-resistant materials** (brick, cement board, masonry, or stucco) wherever possible, regularly clear away debris from any crevices, and perform annual upkeep.


Windows Clear of Vegetation

Windows and Doors

Embers can enter gaps in doors, including garage doors. Install **weather proofing** around all your doors. Make sure flammable decorations, doormats, wreaths, or flowerbeds, in front of doors are easy movable and brought inside during high fire danger days.

Plants or combustible materials near windows can be ignited from embers and generate radiant heat that can break windows and/or melt combustible frames. Wherever possible, use **dual-paned windows with tempered glass,** as they are less likely to break from heat and start internal fires.

Ready Create Defensible Space

Defensible space is the area around your home on your property in which vegetation, debris, and other combustible fuels have been removed to slow the spread of fire to and from the home.

It can better protect the home from igniting due to an ember storm, direct flame contact, and radiant heat. Defensible space is essential to help protect a structure and create a safer area for firefighters during a wildfire.

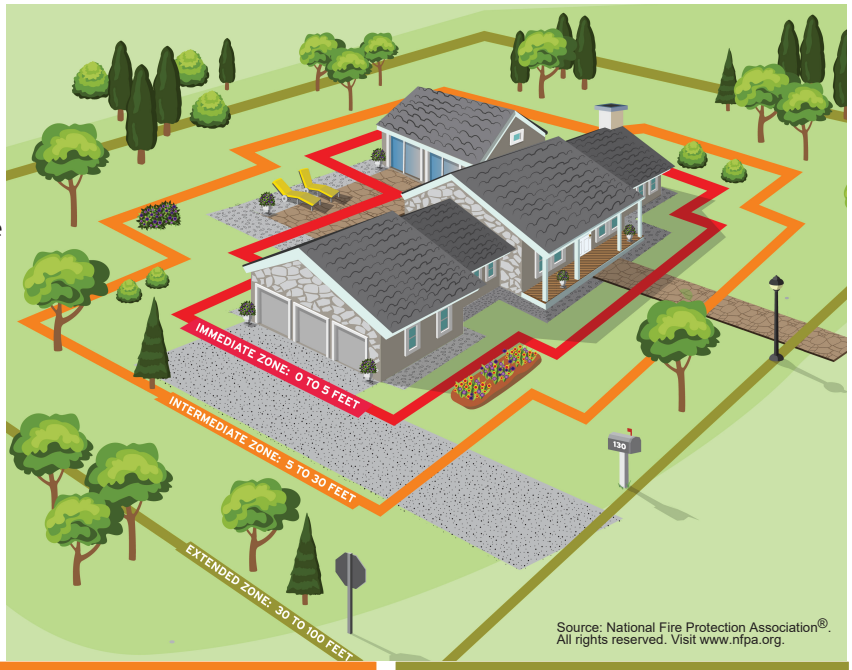
You should create defensible space by removing weeds, brush, and firewood, and by spacing out vegetation on your property.

Although this might seem like a daunting task, we recommend starting in the Immediate Zone and working your way out.

Collaborate with neighbors and adjacent property owners to address needs outside of your property.

Follow the considerations below for each zone and your property can become safer with each step.

Remember to only cut or remove vegetation on your own property.



Source: National Fire Protection Association®. All rights reserved. Visit www.nfpa.org.

IMMEDIATE ZONE

0-5 feet around your home "Noncombustible"

- Clean roofs and gutters of fallen leaves, branches, and debris that could catch embers.
- Prune away touching or over hanging branches from the roof to a distance of at least 10 feet.
- Replace or repair any loose or missing shingles or roof tiles to prevent ember penetration.
- Reduce embers that could pass through vents in the eaves by installing 1/8 inch metal mesh screening.
- Clean debris from exterior attic vents and install 1/8 inch metal mesh screening to reduce embers.
- Move all flammable material away from exterior walls – mulch, flammable plants, leaves, and firewood piles – anything that can burn.
- Use hard scape such as concrete or noncombustible rock mulch around your home.
- Remove anything stored underneath decks and porches.

INTERMEDIATE ZONE

5-30 feet around your home or to property line

- Create vegetation islands to break up the continuity of fuels around your home using native central Texas fire-resistant plants while removing leaf debris from the yard.
- Create fuel breaks with driveways, walkways/paths, patios, and decks.
- Keep lawns mowed to a height of three inches while native grasses and wildflowers are kept at four inches.
- Remove ladder fuels (vegetation under trees) so a surface fire cannot reach the crowns. Prune trees six to ten feet up from the ground; do not exceed 1/3 of the overall tree height.
- Ensure the mature tree canopy is no closer than ten feet to the edge of the structure.
- It is important in central Texas to keep the tree crowns intact to maintain the health and integrity of a continuous tree canopy.
- Move trailers, recreational vehicles, storage sheds, and woodpiles into the Extended Zone.

EXTENDED ZONE

30-100 feet around your home or to property line

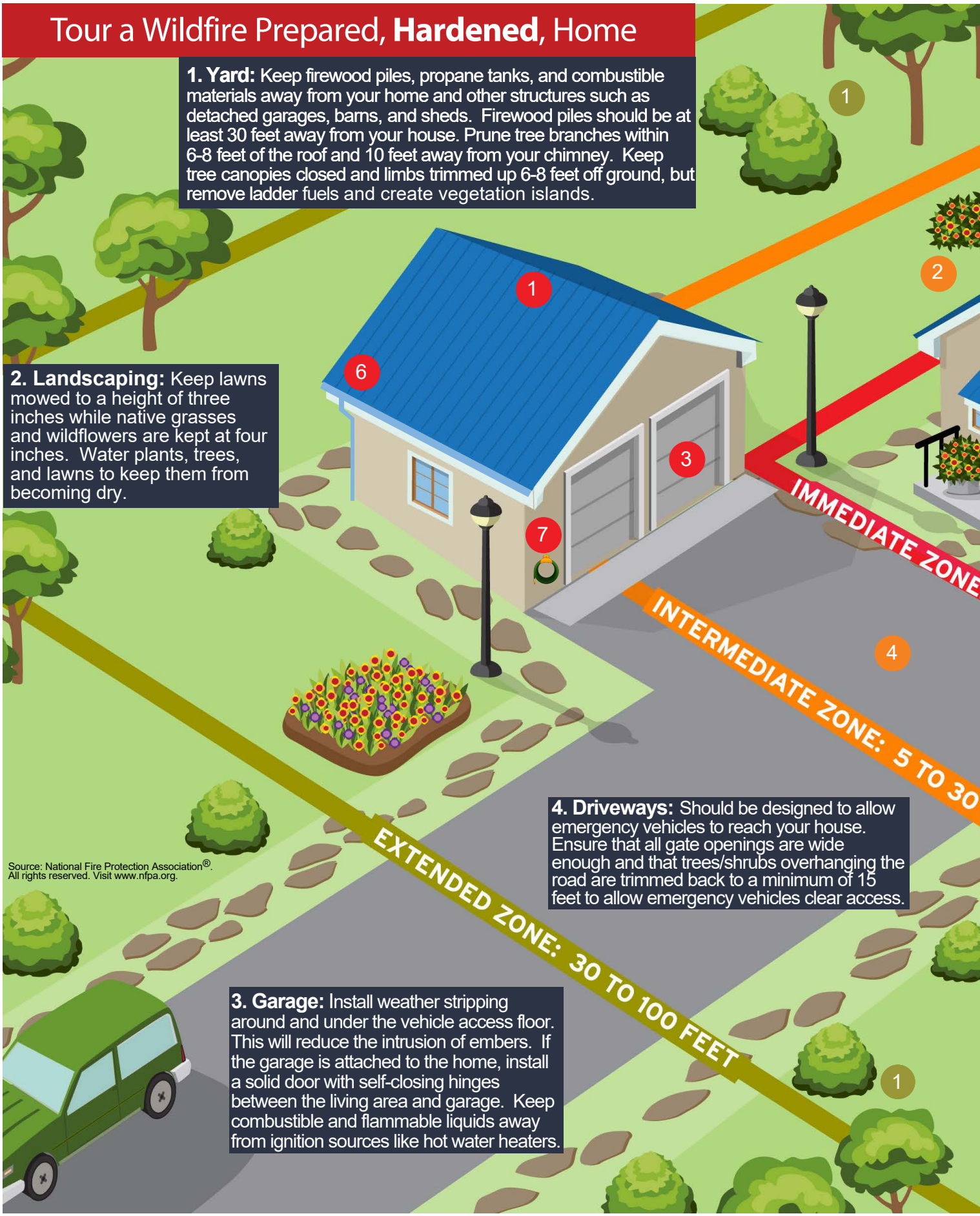
- Dispose of heavy accumulations of ground litter/debris.
- Remove dead and down plant and tree material.
- Remove small trees growing between mature trees.
- Remove vegetation and woodpiles adjacent to storage sheds or other outbuildings within this area.
- Store firewood in this area, keeping it a safe distance from your structure.
- If your property allows, continue this zone out to 200 feet.
- If you have more than 200 feet spacing, consider creating separation from your adjacent neighbor by maintaining a shaded fuel break on your side of the property line.
- Again, it is important in central Texas to keep the tree crowns intact to maintain the health and integrity of a continuous tree canopy.
- In all Zones, maintain compliance with local government and HOA/NA regulations.

Remember the Ember Zone

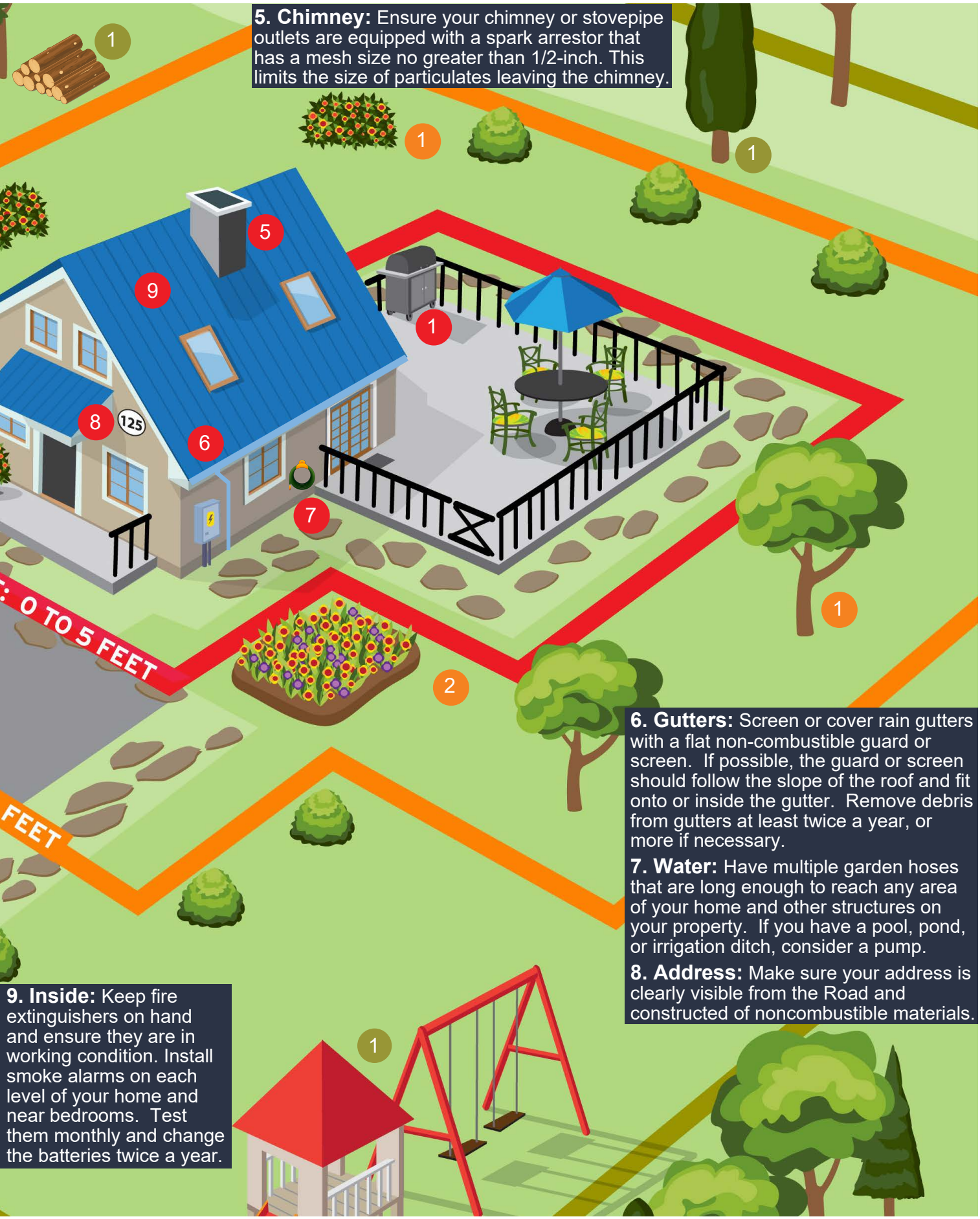
Embers are burning pieces of airborne material that can be carried more than a mile by the wind. Research points to embers and small flames as the main ways homes ignite in wildfires.



Tour a Wildfire Prepared, **Hardened**, Home



Source: National Fire Protection Association®.
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5. Chimney: Ensure your chimney or stovepipe outlets are equipped with a spark arrestor that has a mesh size no greater than 1/2-inch. This limits the size of particulates leaving the chimney.
1
1
1
1
5
9
1
8
125
6
7
1
0 TO 5 FEET
2
FEET
6. Gutters: Screen or cover rain gutters with a flat non-combustible guard or screen. If possible, the guard or screen should follow the slope of the roof and fit onto or inside the gutter. Remove debris from gutters at least twice a year, or more if necessary.
7. Water: Have multiple garden hoses that are long enough to reach any area of your home and other structures on your property. If you have a pool, pond, or irrigation ditch, consider a pump.
8. Address: Make sure your address is clearly visible from the Road and constructed of noncombustible materials.
9. Inside: Keep fire extinguishers on hand and ensure they are in working condition. Install smoke alarms on each level of your home and near bedrooms. Test them monthly and change the batteries twice a year.
1

Create Your Own Action Plan

Your Wildfire Action Plan must be prepared with all members of your household well in advance of a wildfire. Use these checklists to help you get Ready and Set with situational awareness in the threat of wildfire.

Ready Get Ready

❑ Create an Action Plan that includes evacuation meeting locations and communication plans - rehearse it regularly. Include the evacuation of all pets and large animals, which may include horses and livestock, in your plan.

❑ WarnCentralTexas.org

The Capital Area Council of Governments and its partners are pleased to offer an emergency notification system to residents of Central Texas. Registering with WarnCentralTexas allows local officials to contact their communities by phone, email, and/or text during times of disasters or public safety events. www.warncentraltexas.org/alerts

❑ Designate an emergency meeting location outside the wildfire hazard area.

❑ Plan and practice several different evacuation routes.

❑ Have fire extinguishers on hand and teach your household how to use them.

❑ Ensure that everyone in your household knows where your gas, electric, and water main shut-off controls are located and how to use them.

❑ Assemble a Go Kit as recommended by the American Red Cross. Keep an extra kit in your vehicle. Check this page for a list of recommended emergency supplies.

❑ Check this page for a list of recommended emergency supplies.

❑ Have a portable radio so you can stay updated on the fire and weather emergency announcements.

EMERGENCY SUPPLIES LIST FOR GO KIT

The American Red Cross recommends every household have an emergency supply kit assembled long before a wildfire or other emergency occurs. Use the checklist below to help assemble yours. For more information on emergency supplies visit redcross.org/get-help.

❑ Three-day supply of water (one gallon per person, per day) and non-perishable food for household members (3 day supply).

❑ First aid kit and sanitation supplies, including toilet paper and baby wipes.

❑ Flashlight, battery-powered radio, and extra batteries.

❑ An extra set of car keys, credit cards, cash, or traveler's checks.

❑ Extra eyeglasses, contact lenses, prescriptions, and medications.

❑ Important household member documents and contact numbers, including insurance documents.

❑ Map marked with evacuation routes. It is important to have a printed map in case your phone dies. It may also be easier to see the printed map than a phone screen under smokey conditions.

❑ Easily carried valuables and irreplaceable items.

❑ Personal electronic devices and chargers.

❑ Keep a pair of old shoes and a flashlight handy in case of a sudden evacuation at night.

Set Prepare and Be Aware

❑ Monitor fire weather conditions and fire status. Check your local fire department or emergency management websites and social media accounts for wildfire information. Stay tuned to your TV or local radio stations for updates, including Red Flag Warnings in your area.

❑ Alert household and neighbors.

❑ Dress in appropriate clothing (i.e., clothing made from natural fibers, such as cotton, and work boots). Have goggles and a dry bandana or particle mask handy.

❑ Ensure your Go Kit includes all necessary items, such as a battery powered radio, spare batteries, emergency contact numbers, and drinking water.

❑ Remain close to your house, drink plenty of water, and ensure your household members and pets are accounted for and ready to leave.

INSIDE CHECKLIST, IF TIME ALLOWS

❑ Close all windows and doors.

❑ Remove all shades and curtains from windows and ensure all blinds remain open, unless you have metal blinds. Close all metal blinds.

❑ Move furniture to the center of the room, away from windows and doors.

❑ Turn off pilot lights and air conditioning units.

❑ Leave your lights on so firefighters can see your house in smoky conditions

OUTSIDE CHECKLIST, IF TIME ALLOWS

❑ Make sure combustible items are a safe distance away from the exterior of the house (e.g., patio furniture, children's toys, door mats, etc.) If you have time, place these items inside your garage or home where they will not become a hazard.

❑ Turn off propane tanks and other gas at the meter.

❑ Don't leave sprinklers on or water running. They can affect critical water pressure.

❑ Leave exterior lights on.

❑ Back your car into the driveway to facilitate a quick departure. Shut doors and roll up windows.

❑ Have a ladder ready to use to cover attic vents. Use pre-cut plywood or commercial seals. Use the same for ground vents. Do so in a safe manner, and only if time permits.

❑ Patrol your property and extinguish small fires, if you can do so safely, until you leave.

IF YOU ARE TRAPPED: SURVIVAL TIPS

❑ If you have become trapped and cannot evacuate, call 9-1-1 immediately.

❑ Stay in your home, sheltering away from walls, until the fire passes or emergency personnel tell you differently. Follow their instructions and commands.

❑ Look for spot fires and extinguish if found inside house.

❑ Wear long sleeves, long pants, and a bandana made of natural fibers, such as cotton.

❑ Stay hydrated.

❑ Ensure you can exit the home if it catches fire. Remember, if it's hot inside the house, it is four to five times hotter outside. Be prepared.

❑ Fill sinks and tubs for an emergency water supply.

❑ Place wet towels under doors to keep smoke and embers out.

❑ After the fire has passed, check your roof and extinguish any fires, sparks, or embers if you are able to safely do so. Check the attic as well.

Go! Act Early

Leaving early gives you and your household members the best chance of surviving a wildfire. You also help firefighters by keeping roads clear of congestion, enabling them to move more freely and do their job in a safer environment. Be sure to follow the direction of your local authorities.

WHEN TO LEAVE
Do not wait to be advised to leave if there is a possible threat to your home or evacuation route. Leave early enough to avoid being caught in fire, smoke, or road congestion. If you are advised to leave by local authorities, do not hesitate!

WHERE TO GO
Go to a predetermined, low-risk area such as a relative's house, a Red Cross shelter or evacuation center, motel, etc.

HOW TO GET THERE Have several travel routes in case one route is blocked by the fire or by emergency vehicles. Choose the safest route away from the fire.

WHAT TO TAKE
Take your Go Kit containing your household members' and pet's necessary items.

REMEMBER THE 8 P'S!

- ❑ People & Pets
- ❑ Pictures & Photo Albums
- ❑ PC's
- ❑ Papers (important)
- ❑ Prescriptions & Medications (for your pets too)
- ❑ Plastics (credit cards)
- ❑ Personal Devices (phones and chargers)
- ❑ Passports & IDs



Steiner Ranch Wildfire Evacuation, Sept. 4, 2011

Photo credit: Travis Co. Fire Marshals Office

IAFC Wildfire Programs are funded through DHS/FEMA/AFG/FP&S grants awarded FY2018 (EMW-2018-FP-00279) and FY2019 (EMW-2019-FP-00412) and in cooperation with the USDA Forest Service. In accordance with Federal law and U.S. Department of Agriculture policy, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) To file a complaint alleging discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington DC 20250-9410 or call toll free voice 866-632-9992, TDD 800- 877-8339, or voice relay (866) 377-8642. USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

My Personal WILDFIRE ACTION PLAN

Write up your Wildfire Action Plan and post it in a location where every member of your household can see it. Rehearse it with your household.

During high-fire-danger days in your area, monitor your local media for information and be ready to implement your plan. Hot, dry, and windy conditions create the perfect environment for a wildfire.

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

Out-of-Area Contact _____ Phone:_____

Work _____ _____ _____

School _____ _____ _____

Other _____ _____ _____

EVACUATION ROUTES

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

WHERE TO GO

_____

_____

_____

_____

LOCATION OF GO KIT(S)

_____

_____

NOTES

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

READY, SET, GO!

My Personal WILDFIRE ACTION PLAN

Ready

Get Ready

- ☑ Registering with WarnCentralTexas for phone, email, and/or text during times of disasters or public safety events. www.warncentraltexas.org/alerts
- ☑ Dispose of or relocate combustible material from around your home.
- ☑ Trim trees and bushes allowing ample space between your home and landscape vegetation.
- ☑ Arrange your Go Kit with prescription medication, emergency supplies, important documents, and other essential items.

Set

Prepare and Be Aware

- ☑ Make sure you have your Go Kit on hand in an accessible place.
- ☑ Alert household and neighbors of your action plan. Ensure your household members and pets are accounted for and ready to leave.
- ☑ Monitor local fire weather conditions and listen to emergency notification systems.

Go!

Act Early

- ☑ Get your Go Kit and leave well before the threat approaches using a planned, accessible route.
- ☑ Stay aware of the situation and follow your plan.
- ☑ Cooperate with local authorities during evacuation and re-entry processes.

wildlandfireRSG.org