

Review: Resources on Wildfire Prevention and Recovery

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In a year of unprecedented wildfires, it is important to identify resources on fire prevention and recovery of use to Cooperative Extension clients. More than 140,000 wildfires occur on average each year, with approximately 900 homes destroyed. It is estimated that ten times as many people live in fire-prone areas (red-zones) as did 25 years ago.

An excellent introduction to wildfires is *How can we live with wildland fire?* This publication is edited by Cathy Lemp and has a companion videotape (Oakland, CA: Agriculture and Natural Resources Communication Services, 1997 and 1999). The publication and videotape encourage community members to discuss three possible choices for action: reducing fuel to make fires easier to manage and control, strengthening communities by creating defensible spaces, and increasing the cost of insurance to those who decide to live in red-zones. The publication and video can be ordered at

<http://anrcatalog.ucdavis.edu/merchant.ihtml?pid=625&lastcatid=353&step=4>.

The following Web sites cover wildfire prevention with the premise that a well-prepared home has the greatest chance of surviving a wildfire. *Is your home protected from wildfire disaster?* and *Protect your home against wildfire damage* are on the Institute for Business and Home Safety's Web site (<http://www.ibhs.org/>, click on "wildfire"). For business owners the Web site contains *Open for business* which includes developing strategic plans for wildfires and several checklists.

How to make your home fire safe from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (<http://www.fire.ca.gov/Education/pdf/Checklistrevised.pdf>) contains a checklist for inside and outside the home. *Making your home firewise*, the *Firewise construction checklist*, and *Fire hazard assessment in the wildland/urban interface* are available from Firewise (http://www.firewise.org/www/pubs_win.htm, click on "homeowner information"). The Web site offers excellent suggestions for fireproofing the home and the area surrounding it. There is also a walk-through videostream of housing and landscapes that employ defensible strategies.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency's Web site offers the *Rural fire prevention checklist*, *Avoiding wildfire damage*, *Wildland fires*, *Protecting your property from fire* (landscaping), *Protecting your property from fire* (housing), and *Wildfires* which all provide suggestions on what homeowners should do before, during, and after a fire (http://www.fema.gov/tab_education.shtml, click on "fire safety"). This Web site also includes *The Extension agent's handbook for emergency preparation and response* by D. L. Bilbo and Jay Todd. The National Endowment for Financial Education has *Are you prepared financially to survive a natural disaster?* (<http://www.nefe.org/pages/search.html>, type in "disaster"). Finally, New Mexico State University has the fact sheet *Making your home safe from wildland fire* (http://cahe.nmsu.edu/pubs/_h/h-708.html).

The common recommendations for wildfire prevention focus on landscaping and housing. For landscaping, homeowners should plant more native vegetation; space trees at least 10 feet apart; remove vegetation, yard debris, and other combustible materials within a radius of 30 feet of the house; keep trees and shrubs pruned; mow lawns regularly; clear roofs, gutters, and eaves of debris; trim branches so they do not extend over roofs or near chimneys; move firewood and storage tanks 50 feet away from the home; and do not connect wooden fencing directly to the home.

Housing recommendations include the following: use only noncombustible roofing materials; box in the eaves, soffits, and sub-floors with fire-resistant materials like treated wood; apply one-fourth-inch noncombustible screening to all vent or eave openings; install spark arresters in chimneys; enclose the undersides of decks with fire resistant materials; cover exterior walls with materials like stucco, stone, or brick; and use double-paned or tempered glass for all exterior windows.

There are not as many resources on wildfire recovery. The most extensive is *Recovering from wildfire: A guide for California's forest landowners* by Susie Kocher, Richard Harris, and Gary Nakamura (Oakland, CA: Agriculture and Natural Resources Communication Services, 2001). This publication discusses how to protect property from further damage due to erosion (clear culverts, maintain waterbars, add log terraces, and re-seed), where to go for help, locating financial assistance, how to manage salvage harvesting, claiming a casualty, and how to help the surrounding forest recover (<http://anrcatalog.ucdavis.edu/merchant.ihtml?pid=5375&lastcatid=353&step=4>).

The Federal Emergency Management Agency offers *After the fire* (<http://www.usfa.fema.gov/dhtml/public/after.cfm>), which discusses how to return to normal after a fire such as valuing property, recovering important records, and salvaging clothing, food, rugs, and furniture. The American Red Cross Web site contains a number of educational materials relating to fires and disasters (<http://www.redcross.org>, type in "wildfire") covering

issues such as conducting a household inventory, notifying creditors and employers, insurance claims, loans and grants, and tax credits.

These wildfire recovery Web sites have common recommendations beginning with being very careful when reentering a burned area because hot spots can flare up without warning. A homeowner should immediately check the roof and attic, and extinguish any sparks or embers. For several hours afterward, the home should be rechecked. Some concerns are that roofing materials may buckle, partially melt, or burn causing leaks; windows may break, doorframes may warp, and weather stripping may be damaged; siding may warp, melt, or burn and paint may be damaged; and utilities may be disrupted.

Homeowners should secure the site against further damage, contact their insurance company, estimate and repair structural damage, and generally clean and repair the site. Homeowners should develop a plan on how to approach these tasks and who will perform them (including professionals).

An understanding of the availability of resources on wildfire prevention and recovery can be useful when clients living in red-zones need assistance. Additional information is available at Colorado State University Cooperative Extension's fire and drought Web site (<http://drought.colostate.edu/index.asp?url=fire>).

The opinions stated in this review are the opinions of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the individuals and organizations who support *The Forum for Family and Consumer Issues*.

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