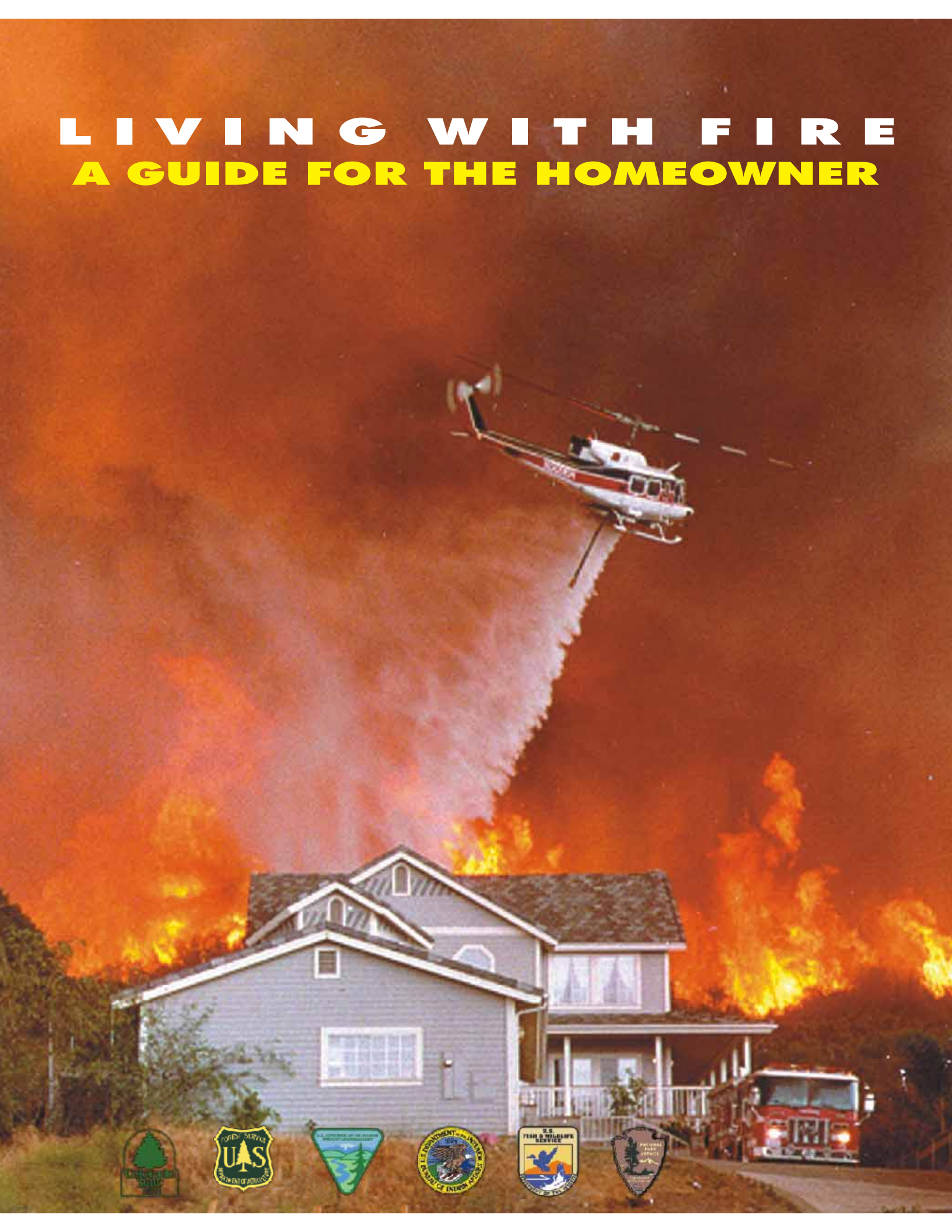


# LIVING WITH FIRE

## A GUIDE FOR THE HOMEOWNER



# LIVING WITH

# FIRE

Colorado State Forest Service • USDA - Forest Service • Bureau of Land Management • National Park Service • Bureau of Indian Affairs • US Fish and Wildlife Service

## LIVING IN A HIGH HAZARD FIRE ENVIRONMENT

**M**uch of Colorado is considered a high hazard fire environment. Based on past experience, this area possesses all the ingredients necessary to support large, intense, and uncontrollable wildfires, especially due to the density of our forests, and the buildup of dead trees, brush, and other material.

Within this hazardous environment are individual houses, subdivisions, and communities. Many of these structures would be unable to survive intense wildfire. Since it is not a question of "if" wildfires will occur but "when," they will occur, the likelihood of human life and property loss is great and increases daily.

Our ability to live more safely in this fire environment greatly depends upon our use of "pre-fire activities." These are steps taken before a wildfire occurs which improve the survivability of people and homes. They include proper vegetation management around the home (known as defensible space), use of fire resistant building materials, appropriate subdivision design, and management actions such as mechani-

cal treatment and prescribed fire. Research clearly demonstrates that pre-fire activities save lives and property.

The Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) participates with other fire prevention cooperators in a program called FireWise which will facilitate widespread implementation of pre-fire activities throughout Colorado. For more information concerning this program or for other wildfire concerns, please contact your local CSFS district office:

Alamosa	719.589.2271
Boulder	303.442.0428
Canon City	719.275.6865
Durango	970.247.5250
Fort Collins	970.491.8660
Fort Morgan	970.867.5610
Franktown	303.442.0428
Golden	303.279.9757
Granby	970.887.3121
Grand Junction	970.248.7325
Gunnison	970.641.6852
La Junta	719.384.9087
La Veta	719.742.3588
Montrose	970.249.9051
Salida	719.539.2579
Steamboat Springs	970.879.0475
Woodland Park	719.687.2951

## "LIVING WITH FIRE" - PRE-FIRE ACTIVITIES



The pre-fire activities implemented by this homeowner included a green and well maintained landscape, reduction of wildland vegetation around the perimeter of the property, a fire resistant roof, and a good access road with a turnaround area. The charred surroundings of the home show that these pre-fire activities effectively protected it when wildfire hit.

## THE "WHY WE'RE WORRIED ABOUT WILDFIRE" EQUATION



## THE FIRE ENVIRONMENT

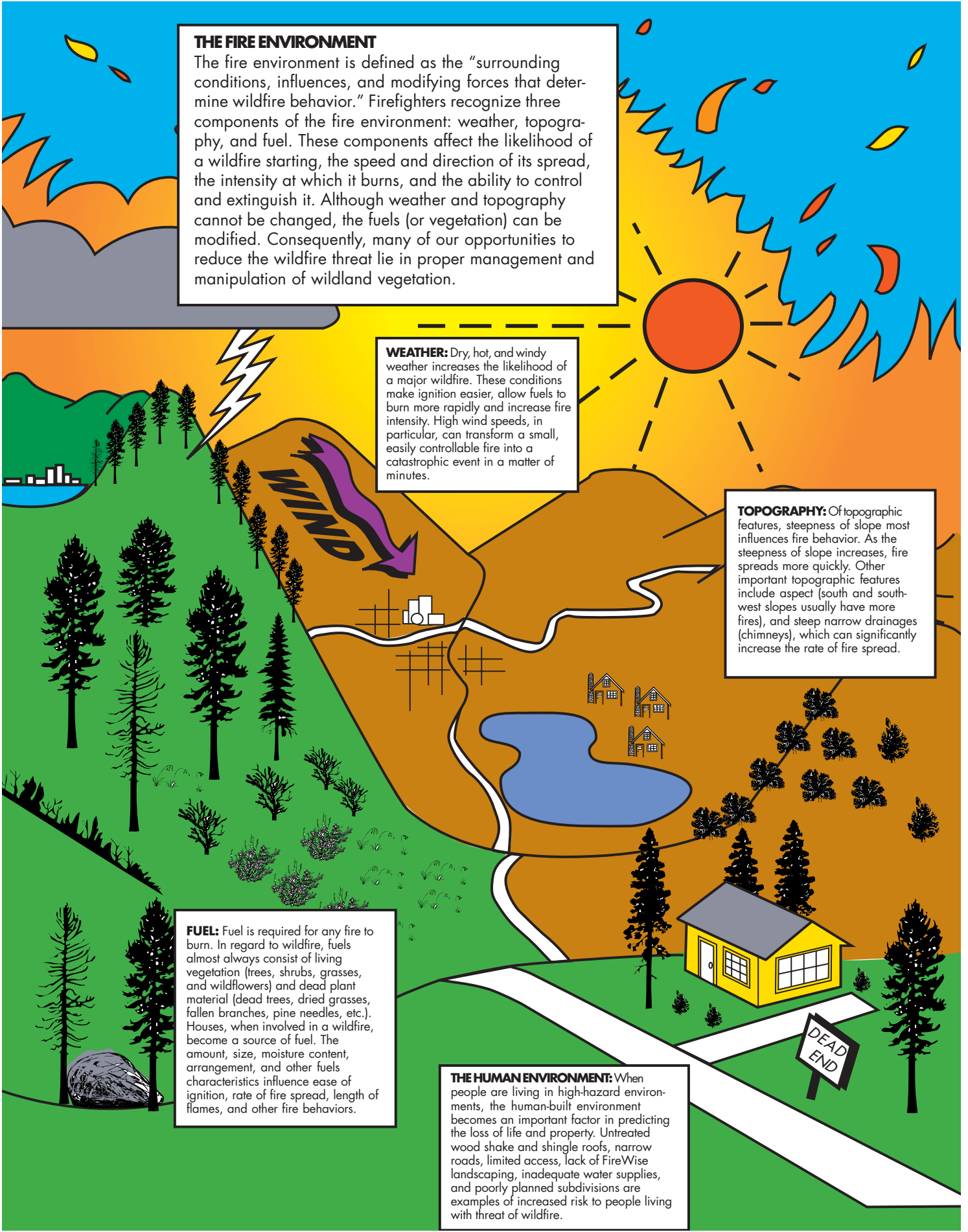
The fire environment is defined as the “surrounding conditions, influences, and modifying forces that determine wildfire behavior.” Firefighters recognize three components of the fire environment: weather, topography, and fuel. These components affect the likelihood of a wildfire starting, the speed and direction of its spread, the intensity at which it burns, and the ability to control and extinguish it. Although weather and topography cannot be changed, the fuels (or vegetation) can be modified. Consequently, many of our opportunities to reduce the wildfire threat lie in proper management and manipulation of wildland vegetation.

**WEATHER:** Dry, hot, and windy weather increases the likelihood of a major wildfire. These conditions make ignition easier, allow fuels to burn more rapidly and increase fire intensity. High wind speeds, in particular, can transform a small, easily controllable fire into a catastrophic event in a matter of minutes.

**TOPOGRAPHY:** Of topographic features, steepness of slope most influences fire behavior. As the steepness of slope increases, fire spreads more quickly. Other important topographic features include aspect (south and southwest slopes usually have more fires), and steep narrow drainages (chimneys), which can significantly increase the rate of fire spread.

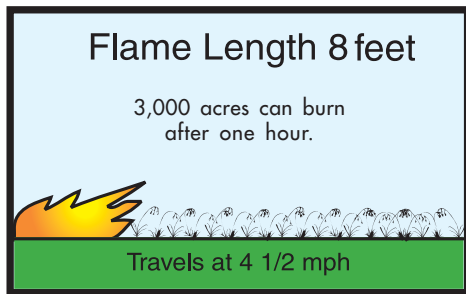
**FUEL:** Fuel is required for any fire to burn. In regard to wildfire, fuels almost always consist of living vegetation (trees, shrubs, grasses, and wildflowers) and dead plant material (dead trees, dried grasses, fallen branches, pine needles, etc.). Houses, when involved in a wildfire, become a source of fuel. The amount, size, moisture content, arrangement, and other fuels characteristics influence ease of ignition, rate of fire spread, length of flames, and other fire behaviors.

**THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT:** When people are living in high-hazard environments, the human-built environment becomes an important factor in predicting the loss of life and property. Untreated wood shake and shingle roofs, narrow roads, limited access, lack of FireWise landscaping, inadequate water supplies, and poorly planned subdivisions are examples of increased risk to people living with threat of wildfire.

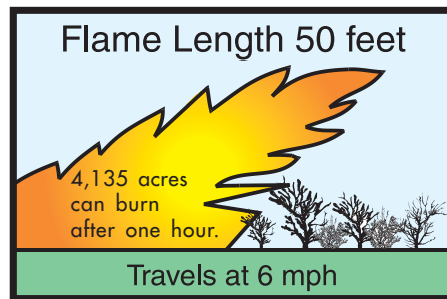


# EXAMPLES OF LOCAL FIRE BEHAVIOR\*

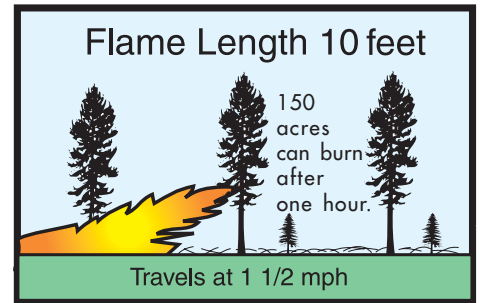
Presented below are five types of vegetation common to Colorado with computer generated estimates of how they would burn under certain conditions. These predictions assume a wind speed of 20 mph, flat terrain, typical moisture contents of living and dead vegetation for summertime, and normal August weather for our area.



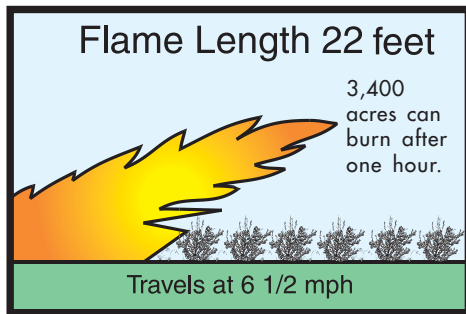
**Cheatgrass:** Cheatgrass is an invasive annual grass that usually occupies areas formerly vegetated with big sagebrush. It can dominate old burned areas, abandoned pastures, and other disturbed areas.



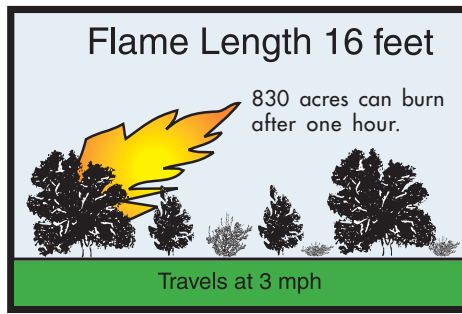
**Gamble Oak/Scrub Oak:** This is a heavy brush type consisting of large gamble oak and mountain shrubs. Unusual late frosts can create large amounts of dead woody material. It is common in western Colorado, Colorado Springs and at lower to mid-elevations of the Rocky Mountains.



**Pine forest:** This type consists of ponderosa pine, often interspersed with some Douglas-fir, lodgepole pine, and other coniferous trees. Pine needles and some young Douglas-fir trees occupy the understory.



**Sagebrush:** Sagebrush is the dominant shrub in this type and there is an understory of cheatgrass, bunch grass, and wildflowers. This type is very common on Colorado's western slope and in lower valley areas.



**Piñon-juniper woodlands:** Piñon pine and juniper mixed with shrubs characterize this vegetation type. It is most commonly found in the south and west parts of Colorado.

\* Fire behavior estimates were prepared by John Swanson, and Marcus Schmidt, USDA Forest Service.



When wildfire flame lengths exceed 11 feet, direct firefighting efforts are ineffective. Under these conditions firefighters use roads, streams, and other barriers to control the wildfire.

## THE LIMITATIONS OF WILDLAND FIREFIGHTING

A lot of people assume that when a wildfire starts, it will be quickly controlled and extinguished. This is an accurate assumption 97% of the time. Firefighters have the ability, equipment, and technology to effectively suppress most wildfires. But 3% of the time wildfires burn so intensely that there is little firefighters can do. In the table to the right are firefighter tactics as they relate to wildfire flame length. Compare this to the flame lengths shown in "Examples of Local Fire Behavior."

FLAME LENGTH	EFFECTIVE FIRE SUPPRESSION TACTICS*
Less than 4 feet	Fireline constructed with hand tools, such as shovels and axes, can be effective at the front of the fire.
4 to 8 feet	Bulldozers and other heavy equipment will be needed to construct an effective fireline. Where bulldozers are not available, fire engines with hoses and water will be required to "knock down" the flames before the fire crews with hand tools can be effective, or fire crews must construct a fireline at a considerable distance from the fire.
8 to 11 feet	Airtankers with fire suppressing retardant or helicopters with water are required to reduce the fire's rate of spread before fireline construction by crews or bulldozers can be effective.
More than 11 feet	Direct fire suppression efforts will be ineffective. Retreat to existing roads, streams and other barriers. Burn out vegetation between the fireline and the advancing fire front to eliminate wildfire fuels.

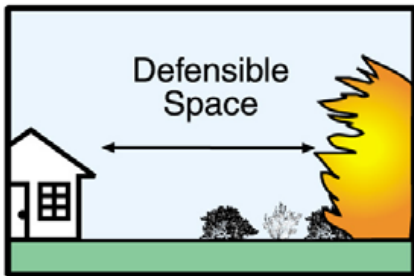
\*Adapted from information provided by John Swanson, USDA Forest Service.

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT DEFENSIBLE SPACE



More and more homes are being built in high fire hazard environments.

In the 1980's, the term "defensible space" was coined to describe vegetation management practices aimed at reducing wildfire threats to homes. This article responds to some of the commonly asked questions about defensible space.



## WHAT IS DEFENSIBLE SPACE?

Defensible space is the area between a house and an oncoming wildfire where the vegetation has been modified to reduce the wildfire threat and to provide an opportunity for firefighters to effectively defend the house. Sometimes, a defensible space is simply a homeowner's properly maintained backyard.

## WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VEGETATION AND WILDFIRE THREAT?

Many people do not view the plants growing on their property as a threat. But in terms of wildfire, the vegetation adjacent to their homes can have considerable influence upon the survivability of their houses. All vegetation, including plants native to the area as well as ornamental plants, is potential wildfire fuel. If vegetation is properly modified and maintained, a wildfire can be slowed, the length of flames shortened, and the

amount of heat reduced, all of which assist firefighters to defend the home against an oncoming wildfire.

## THE FIRE DEPARTMENT IS SUPPOSED TO PROTECT MY HOUSE, SO WHY BOTHER WITH DEFENSIBLE SPACE?

Some individuals incorrectly assume that a fire engine will be parked in their driveway and firefighters will be actively defending their homes if a wildfire approaches. During a major wildfire, it is unlikely there will be enough firefighting resources available to defend every home. In these instances, firefighters will likely select homes they can most safely and effectively protect. Even with adequate resources, some wildfires may be so intense that there may be little firefighters can do to prevent a house from burning. The key is to reduce fire intensity as wildfire nears the house. This can be accomplished by reducing the amount of flammable vegetation surrounding a home. Consequently, the most important person in protecting a house from wildfire is not a firefighter, but the property owner. The action taken by the owner before the wildfire occurs (such as proper landscaping) is the most critical.

## DOES DEFENSIBLE SPACE REQUIRE A LOT OF BARE GROUND IN MY LANDSCAPE?

No. Unfortunately, many people have this misconception. While bare ground is certainly effective in reducing the wildfire threat, it is unnecessary and unacceptable due to appearance, soil erosion, and other reasons. Many homes have attractive, well-vegetated landscapes that also serve as effective defensible space.

## DOES CREATING A DEFENSIBLE SPACE REQUIRE ANY SPECIAL SKILLS OR EQUIPMENT?

No. For the most part, creating a defensible space employs routine gardening and landscape maintenance practices such as pruning, mowing, weeding, plant removal, appropriate plant selection, and irrigation. Equipment needed includes common tools like a chain saw, pruning saw, pruning shears, loppers, weed-eater, shovel, and a rake. A chipper, compost bin, or a large rented trash dumpster may be useful in disposing of unwanted plant material.



## HOW BIG IS AN EFFECTIVE DEFENSIBLE SPACE?

Defensible space size is not the same for everyone, but varies by slope and type of wildland vegetation growing near the house. See the article entitled "Creating An Effective Defensible Space" for specific information.

## DOES DEFENSIBLE SPACE MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Yes. Investigations of homes threatened by wildfire indicate that houses with an effective defensible space are much more likely to survive a wildfire. Furthermore, homes with both an effective defensible space and a nonflammable roof (composition shingles, tile, metal, etc.) are many times more likely to survive a wildfire than those without defensible space and flammable roofs (wood shakes or shingles). These conditions give firefighters the opportunity to effectively and safely defend the home.

## DOES HAVING A DEFENSIBLE SPACE GUARANTEE MY HOUSE WILL SURVIVE A WILDFIRE? **No.**

**Under extreme conditions, almost any house can burn.** But having a defensible space will significantly improve the odds of your home surviving a wildfire.

## WHY DOESN'T EVERYONE LIVING IN A HIGH WILDFIRE HAZARD AREA CREATE A DEFENSIBLE SPACE?

The specific reasons for not creating a defensible space are varied. Some individuals believe "it won't happen to me." Others think the costs (time, money, effort, loss of privacy, etc.) outweigh the benefits. Some fail to implement defensible space practices simply because of lack of knowledge or misconceptions.

THE THREE R's OF DEFENSIBLE SPACE	
<p><b>HOW DO I CHANGE THE VEGETATION ON MY PROPERTY TO REDUCE THE WILDFIRE THREAT?</b></p> <p>The objective of defensible space is to reduce the wildfire threat to a home by changing the characteristics of the adjacent vegetation. Defensible space practices include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increasing the moisture content of vegetation</li> <li>• decreasing the amount of flammable vegetation</li> <li>• shortening plant height</li> <li>• altering the arrangement of plants</li> </ul> <p>This is accomplished through the "Three R's of Defensible Space." The article "Creating An Effective Defensible Space" provides detailed information about changing vegetation characteristics for defensible space.</p>	<p><b>Removal</b></p> <p>This technique involves the elimination of entire plants, particularly trees and shrubs, from the site. Examples of removal are cutting down a dead tree or cutting out a flammable shrub.</p>
	<p><b>Reduction</b></p> <p>The removal of plant parts, such as branches or leaves, constitutes reduction. Examples of reduction are pruning dead wood from a shrub, removing low tree branches, and mowing dried grass.</p>
	<p><b>Replacement</b></p> <p>Replacement is substituting less flammable plants for more hazardous vegetation. Removal of a dense stand of flammable shrubs and planting an irrigated, well maintained flower bed is an example of replacement.</p>

# CREATING AN EFFECTIVE DEFENSIBLE SPACE\*

## ...A Step-by-Step Guide

Are you worried about the wildfire threat to your home, but aren't sure how to get started in making your home defensible? Follow these six steps to an effective defensible space...

### STEP ONE: HOW BIG IS AN EFFECTIVE DEFENSIBLE SPACE?

The size of the defensible space area is usually expressed as a distance extending outward from the sides of the house. This distance varies by the type of wildland vegetation growing near the house and the steepness of the terrain.

On the "Recommended Defensible Space Distance" chart presented below, find the vegetation type and percent slope (see "Homeowners Guide to Calculating Percent Slope") which best describes the area where your house is located. Then find the recommended defensible space distance for your situation.

For example, if your property is surrounded by wildland grasses such as cheatgrass, and is located on flat land, your recommended defensible space distance

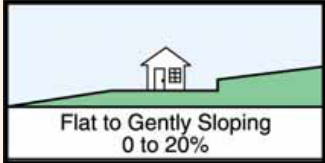

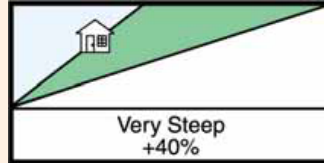
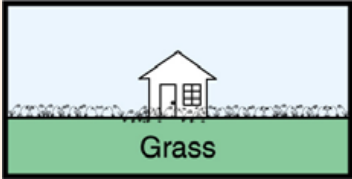
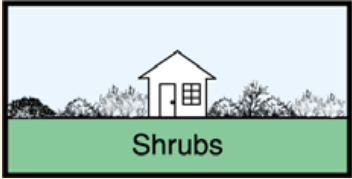

would extend 30 feet from the sides of the house. If your house is on a 25% slope and the adjacent wildland vegetation is dense tall brush, your recommended defensible space distance would be 200 feet.

If the recommended distance goes beyond your property boundaries, contact the adjacent property owner and work cooperatively on creating a defensible space. The effectiveness of defensible space increases when multiple property owners work together. The local assessor's office can provide assistance if the owners of adjacent properties are unknown. Do not work on someone else's property without their permission.

Temporarily mark the recommended distance with flagging or strips of cloth tied to shrubs, trees, or stakes around your home. This will be your defensible space area.

### STEP TWO: IS THERE ANY DEAD VEGETATION WITHIN THE RECOMMENDED DEFENSIBLE SPACE AREA?

Dead vegetation includes dead trees and shrubs, dead branches lying on the ground or still attached to living plants, dried grass, flowers and weeds, dropped leaves and needles, and firewood stacks. In most instances, dead vegetation should be removed from the recommended defensible space area. A description of the types of dead vegetation you're likely to encounter and the recommended actions are presented below on the next page.

		<b>DEFENSIBLE SPACE</b>		
		MINIMUM DISTANCES—STEEPNESS OF SLOPE		
				
		Flat to Gently Sloping 0 to 20%	Moderately Steep 21% to 40%	Very Steep +40%
<b>VEGETATION TYPE</b>	 <b>Grass</b> Wildland grasses (such as cheatgrass), weeds, and widely scattered shrubs with grass understory.	30feet	100feet	100feet
	 <b>Shrubs</b> Includes shrub dominant areas such as sagebrush, gamble oak, and pinyon-juniper.	100feet	200feet	200feet
	 <b>Trees</b> Includes forested areas. If substantial grass or shrub understory is present, use those values shown above.	70feet	105feet	200feet

- 1) Find the percent slope which best describes your property.
- 2) Find the type of vegetation which best describes the wildland plants growing on or near your property.
- 3) Locate the number in feet corresponding to your slope and vegetation. This is your recommended defensible space distance.

\*Please note the recommendations presented in this article are suggestions made by local firefighters experienced in protecting homes from wildfire. They are not requirements nor do they take precedence over local ordinances.

**STEP THREE:** IS THERE A CONTINUOUS DENSE COVER OF SHRUBS OR TREES PRESENT WITHIN THE RECOMMENDED DEFENSIBLE SPACE AREA?

Sometimes wildland plants can occur as an uninterrupted layer of vegetation as opposed to being

patchy or widely spaced individual plants. The more continuous and dense the vegetation, the greater the wildfire threat. If this situation is present within your defensible space area, you should "break-it-up" by providing a separation between plants or small groups of plants.

Not only are steep slopes often considered high wildfire areas, they are also highly erodible. When

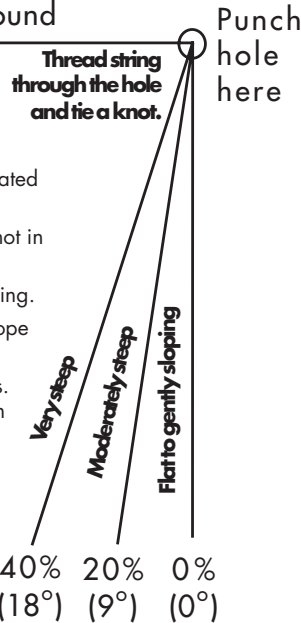
removing shrubs and trees from steep slopes, keep soil disturbance to a minimum. Also, it may be necessary to replace flammable vegetation with other plant materials to prevent excessive soil erosion.

**Homeowner's Guide to Calculating Percent Slope**

Hold this line parallel to the ground

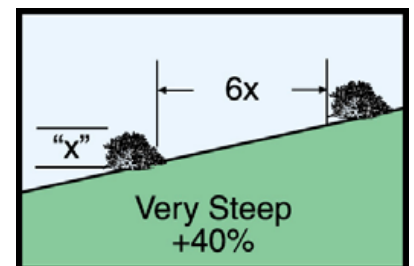
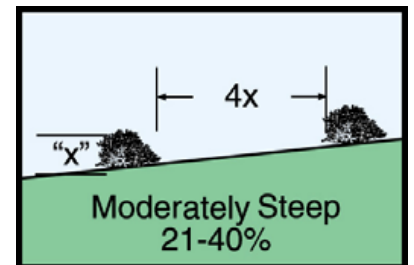
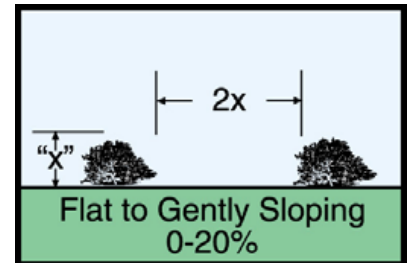
**Instructions:**

1. Enlarge this diagram using a photocopying machine.
2. Mount photocopy on a piece of cardboard.
3. Punch a hold through photocopy and cardboard at the designated spot.
4. Thread a 12-inch piece of string through the hole and tie a knot in the end of the string on the backside of the cardboard.
5. Tie a 1-inch or larger washer to weight the other end of the string.
6. Hold the designated line parallel to the ground, sighting up slope along the edge of the cardboard.
7. The weighted string will indicate the percent of slope steepness. (For convenience, steepness of slope in degrees is presented in parentheses.)



**Recommended Separation Distances for Shrubs, Pinyon, and Juniper**

For areas with dense brush or thick pinyon and juniper trees, the recommended separation distance is dependant upon shrub height and steepness of slope. Specific recommendations are presented below.

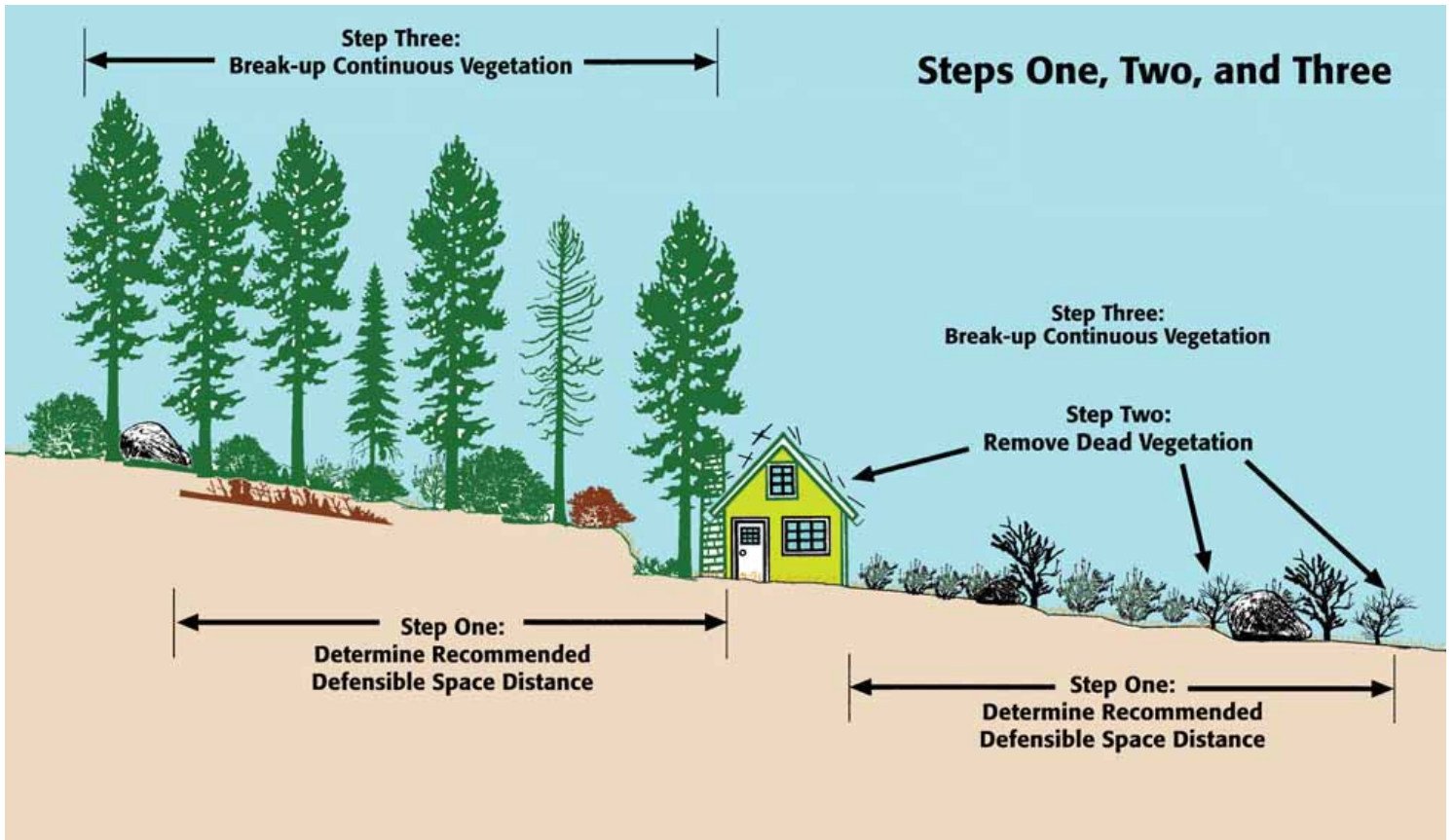


Note: Separation distances are measured between canopies (outermost branches) and not between trunks.

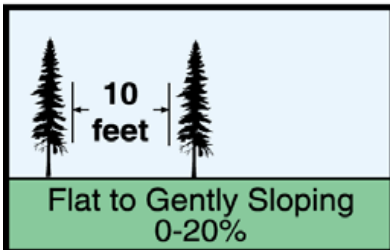
For example, if your home is located on a 10% slope and the brush is four feet tall, the separation distance would be two times the shrub height or eight feet. The recommended separation distance can be accomplished by removing plants or through pruning that reduces the diameter or height of shrubs (shorter height means less separation is needed). Removal works best for sagebrush. For shrubs which readily resprout, pruning to reduce height may be the best approach.

**TYPES OF DEAD VEGETATION AND RECOMMENDED PRACTICE**

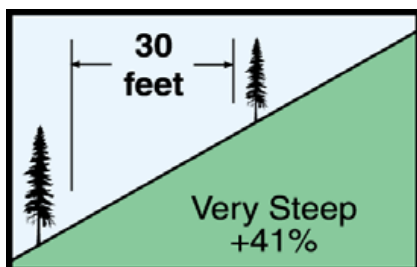
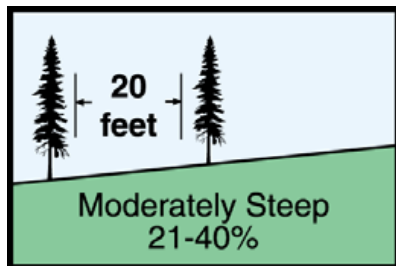
DEAD FUEL TYPE	RECOMMENDED PRACTICE
STANDING DEAD TREE	Remove all standing dead trees from within the defensible space area.
DOWN DEAD TREE	Remove all down dead trees within the defensible space area if they have recently fallen and are not yet embedded into the ground. Downed trees that are embedded into soil and which cannot be removed without soil disturbance should be left in place. Remove all exposed branches from an embedded downed dead tree.
DEAD SHRUBS	Remove all dead shrubs from within the defensible space area.
DRIED GRASSES AND WILDFLOWERS	Once grasses and wildflowers have dried out or "cured," cut down and remove from the defensible space area.
DEAD NEEDLES, LEAVES, BRANCHES, CONES (ON THE GROUND)	Reduce thick layers of pine needles to a depth of two inches. Do not remove all needles. Take care not to disturb the "duff" layer (dark area at the ground surface where needles are decomposing) if present. Remove dead leaves, twigs, cones, and branches.
DEAD NEEDLES, LEAVES, BRANCHES, AND TWIGS (OTHER THAN ON THE GROUND)	Remove all dead leaves, branches, twigs, and needles still attached to living trees and shrubs to height of 15 feet above ground. Remove all debris that accumulates on the roof and in rain gutters on a routine basis (at least once annually).
FIREWOOD AND OTHER COMBUSTIBLE DEBRIS	Locate firewood and other combustible debris (wood scraps, grass clippings, leaf piles, etc.) at least 30 feet uphill from the house.



### Recommended Separation Distances Between Tree Canopies



For forested areas, the recommended amount of separation between tree canopies is determined by steepness of slope. The specific recommendations are presented here. Separation distances are measured between canopies (outer most branches) and not between trunks.



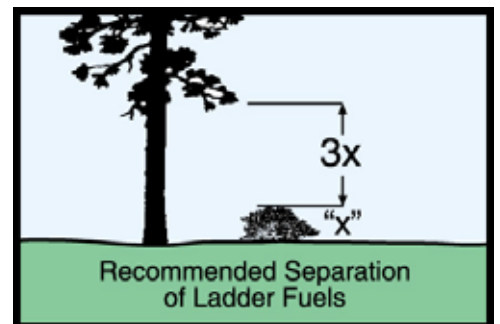
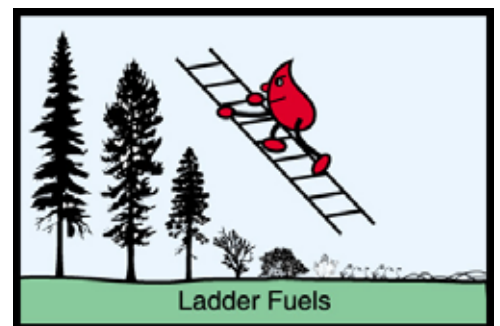
For example, if your house is situated on a 30% slope, the separation of tree canopies within your defensible space should be 20 feet. Creating separation between tree canopies is accomplished through tree removal.

### STEP FOUR: ARE THERE LADDER FUELS PRESENT WITHIN THE RECOMMENDED DEFENSIBLE SPACE AREA?

Vegetation is often present at varying heights, similar to the rungs of a ladder. Under these conditions, flames from fuels burning at ground level, such as a thick layer of pine needles, can be carried to shrubs which can ignite still higher fuels like tree branches. Vegetation that allows a fire to move from lower growing plants to taller ones is referred to as “ladder fuel.” The ladder fuel problem can be corrected by providing a separation between the vegetation layers.

Within the defensible space area, a vertical separation of three times the height of the lower fuel layer is recommended.

For example, if a shrub growing adjacent to a large pine tree is three feet tall, the recommended separation distance would be nine feet. This could be accomplished by removing the lower tree branches, reducing the height of the shrub, or both. The shrub could also be removed.





**STEP FIVE:** IS THERE AN AREA AT LEAST 30 FEET WIDE SURROUNDING YOUR HOUSE THAT IS "LEAN, CLEAN, AND GREEN"?

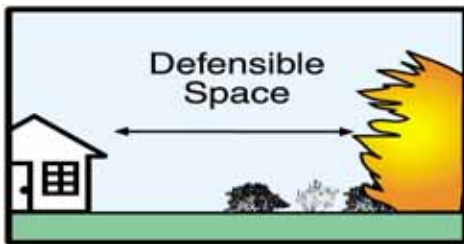
The area immediately adjacent to your house is particularly important in terms of an effective defensible space. It is also the area that is usually landscaped. Within an area extending at least 30 feet from the house, the vegetation should be kept....

- Lean—small amounts of flammable vegetation;
- Clean—no accumulation of dead vegetation or other flammable debris; and
- Green—plants are healthy and green during the fire season.

The "Lean, Clean, and Green Zone Checklist" will help you evaluate the area immediately adjacent to your house.

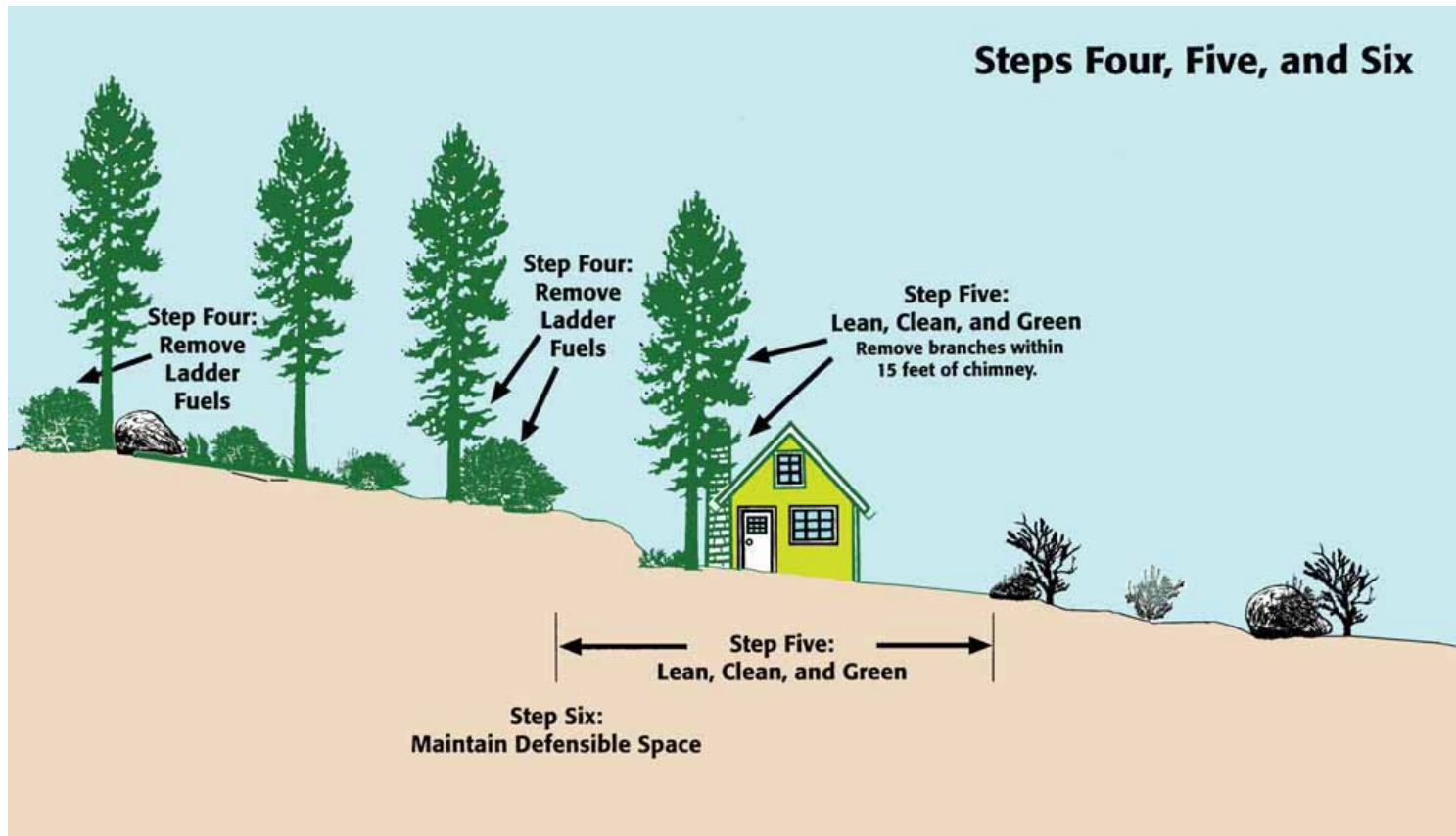
**STEP SIX:** IS THE VEGETATION WITHIN THE RECOMMENDED DEFENSIBLE SPACE AREA MAINTAINED ON A REGULAR BASIS?

Keeping your defensible space effective is a continual process. At least annually, review these defensible space steps and take action accordingly. An effective defensible space can be quickly diminished through neglect.



## THE LEAN, CLEAN, AND GREEN CHECKLIST

- Emphasize the use of low growing herbaceous (non-woody) plants that are kept green during the fire season through irrigation if necessary. Herbaceous plants include lawn, clover, a variety of groundcovers, bedding plants, bulbs, perennial flowers, and conservation grasses.
- Emphasize use of mulches, rock, and non-combustible hard surfaces (concrete sidewalks, brick patios, and asphalt driveways).
- Deciduous ornamental trees and shrubs are acceptable if they are kept green and free of dead plant material, ladder fuels are removed, and individual plants or groups of plants are arranged so that adjacent wildland vegetation cannot convey a fire through them to the structure. Shorter deciduous shrubs are preferred.
- Minimize the use of ornamental coniferous shrubs and trees (such as juniper, arborvitae, and mugo pine) and tall exotic grasses (such as pampas grass).
- Where permitted, most wildland shrubs and trees should be removed from this zone and replaced with more desirable alternatives (see first box). Individual specimens or small groups of wildland shrubs and trees can be retained so long as they are kept healthy and free of dead wood, are pruned to reduce the amount of fuel and height, and ladder fuels are removed.
- For some areas substantial removal of wildland vegetation may not be allowed. In these instances, wildland vegetation should conform to the recommendations presented in steps 2 through 4. Please become familiar with local requirements before removal of wildland vegetation.
- Tree limbs within 15 feet of a chimney, encroaching on powerlines, or touching the house should be removed.



# FIRESCAPE - FIREWISE LANDSCAPE DESIGN

When a wildfire comes through your neighborhood, could your house survive on its own? A dramatic question, but one we need to consider when living in an environment where wildfire is a common occurrence. Firescaping is landscaping that reduces house and property vulnerability to wildfire. The goal is to develop a landscape with a design and choice of plants that offers the best fire protection and enhances the property, surrounding the house with things that are less likely to burn. **(It is imperative when building homes in wildfire-prone areas that fire safety be a major factor in landscape design.)** Appropriate manipulation of the landscape can make a significant contribution toward wildfire survival.

Firescape integrates traditional landscape functions and a design that reduces the threat from wildfire. It need not look much different than a traditional landscape design. In addition to meeting a homeowner's aesthetic desires and functional needs such as entertaining, playing, storage and erosion control, firescape also includes vegetation modification techniques, planting for fire safety, defensible space principles and use of fire safety zones.

Through proper plant selection, placement, and maintenance, we can lessen the possibility of ignition, reduce fire intensity, and slow the rate of fire spread — all of these steps increase a home's survivability.

In firescaping, plant selection is primarily determined by a plant's ability to reduce the wildfire threat. Other considerations may be important such as appearance, ability to hold the soil in place, and wildlife habitat value. The traditional foundation planting of junipers is not a viable solution in a firescape design. Minimize use of evergreen shrubs and trees within 30 feet of a structure, because junipers, other conifers and broadleaf evergreens contain oils, resins and waxes that allow these plants to burn with great intensity. Use ornamental grasses and berries sparingly because they also can be highly flammable. Instead, choose "firewise" plants — those that are low growing with a high moisture content. The stems of these plants are not resinous, oily or waxy. Deciduous trees are generally more fire resistant than evergreens because they have a higher moisture content when in leaf and a lower fuel volume when dormant.

Placement and maintenance of trees and shrubs is as important as actual plant selection. When planning tree placement in the landscape, consider the size of trees at maturity. Keep tree limbs at least 15 feet from chimneys, power lines and structures. Specimen trees can be used near a structure if pruned properly and well irrigated.

Firescape design uses driveways, lawns, walkways, patios, parking areas, areas with inorganic mulches, and fences constructed of nonflammable materials (rock, brick, or cement) to reduce fuel loads and create fuel breaks. Fuel breaks are a vital component in every firescape design. Water features (pools, ponds, or streams) can also be fuel breaks. Areas where wildland vegetation has been thinned or replaced with less flammable plants are traditional fuelbreaks. Remember, while bare ground is an effective fuel break, it is not recommended as a firescape element due to aesthetic concerns, soil erosion, etc.

A home located on a brushy site above a south or west facing slope will require more extensive wildfire safety landscape planning than a house situated on a flat lot with little vegetation around it. Boulders and rocks become fire retardant elements in a design. Whether or not a site can be irrigated will greatly influence location of hardscape (concrete, asphalt, wood decks, etc.), plant selection and placement. In

## EXAMPLES OF SOME PLANTS FOR WILDFIRE SAFETY

Scientific Name	Common Name	Approx. Water Needs	Sun/ Shade Pref.	Approx. Mature Height	Approx. Elev. Max.	Bloom Month
<b>Flowers &amp; Ground Covers</b>						
Aconitum columbianum	Columbian monkshood	M-H	S	2'	9000 ft.	Jun - Jul
Armeria maritima	Sea thrift	L-M	S/PS	1 - 2'	7000 ft.	n/a
Cerastium strictum	Mouse ear chickweed	M	S/SP	1'	8000 ft.	May - Jun
Delphinium spp.	Delphinium	M-H	S/PS	.5 - 3'+	9000 ft.	Jun - Jul
Erysimum asperum	Western wallflower	M	S/PS	1'+	8000 ft.	Jun - Jul
Helianthemum	Rockrose	M-H	S	< 1'	7000 ft.	May - Jun
Heuchera sop.	Coral bells	M-H	PS/Sh	1 - 2'	9000 ft.	Jun - Aug
Linum jewisii	Wild blue flax	L-H	S/PS	1 - 2'	9000 ft.	May - Sep
Phlox subulata	Moss phlox	M	S	< .5'	9000 ft.	May
Potentilla verna	Spring potentilla	M-H	PS/Sh	< .5'	9000 ft.	Mar - May
Rudbeckia hirta	Black-eyed Susan	M-H	S	2 - 3'	9000 ft.	Jul - Sep
Sedum lanoclatum	Yellow stonecrop	M	S/PS	.5'	9000 ft.	n/a
Thalictrum fendleri	Fendler meadowrue	H	S/PS	2 - 3'	9000 ft.	Jul - Aug
<b>Shrubs</b>						
Betula glanulosa	Bog birch	H	S/SP	6 - 8'	9000 ft.	n/a
Cornus stolonifera	Redtwig dogwood	H	S/Sh	4 - 6'	9000 ft.	n/a
Cotoneaster horizontalis	Spreading cotoneaster	M	S/PS	2 - 3'	8000 ft.	May - Jun
Euonymus alatus	Burning bush euonymus	M	S/Sh	1 - 6'	7000 ft.	n/a
Mahonia aquafolia	Oregon grape holly	M-H	S/Sh	4 - 6'	7000 ft.	May - Jun
Mahonia repens	Creeping grape holly	L-H	S/Sh	1 - 2'	9000 ft.	Mar - May
Philadelphus monogynus	Little-leaf mockorange	M	S/Sh	2 - 3'	8000 ft.	Jun
Potentilla fruticosa	Shubby cinquefoil	M	S/PS	2 - 3'	9000 ft.	May - Sep
Prunus besseyi	Western sand cherry	L-M	S	1 - 3'	8000 ft.	n/a
Ribes aureum	Golden currant	M	S/PS	2 - 3'	9000 ft.	Apr - May
Rosa Woodsii	Wood's or native wild rose	M	S/PS	2 - 3'	9000 ft.	Jun - July
Symphoricarpos spp.	"Snowberry, coralberry"	M	S/PS	2 - 3'	9000 ft.	n/a
Viburnum edule	Highbush cranberry	H	S	6 - 8'	9000 ft.	May - Jun
Yucca glauca	"Spanish bayonet, small soapweed, Great Plains yucca"	VL-L	S/PS	2 - 3'	8000 ft.	Jun
<b>Large Shrubs &amp; Trees</b>						
Acer glabrum	Rocky Mountain maple	M-H	S/Sh	6 - 10'	9000 ft.	n/a
Alnus tenuifolia	Thinleaf alder	H	S/PS	6 - 8'	9000 ft.	n/a
Amelanchier utahensis	Utah serviceberry	VL-M	S	4 - 6'	6000 ft.	May
Betula fontina	River birch	H	S/PS	6 - 8'	9000 ft.	n/a
Crataegus spp.	Hawthorn (several native)	M	S	6 - 8'	9000 ft.	May
Fraxinus pennsylvancia	Green ash	M-H	S	20 - 25'	8000 ft.	n/a
Gleditsia triacanthos	Honeylocust	M-H	S	60 - 70'	6000 ft.	May
Malus sp.	Crabapple	M	S	10 - 15'	8000 ft.	Apr-May
Populus tremuloides	Aspen	M	S	8 - 25'	9000 ft.	n/a
Prunus americana	American wild plum	M	S/PS	4 - 6'	8000 ft.	Apr
Prunus cerasifera	Flowering plum	M	S/PS	8 - 10'	7000 ft.	Apr
Prunus virginiana	Western chokecherry	M-H	S/SP	6 - 8'	9000 ft.	Apr - May
Rubus deliciosus	"Boulder raspberry, thimbleweed"	M	S/Sh	4 - 6'	9000 ft.	Apr - May
Salix amygdaloides	Peachleaf willow	H	S/PS	20 - 30'	8000 ft.	n/a

addition, prevailing winds, seasonal weather, local fire history, and characteristics of native vegetation surrounding the site are important considerations.

The 30 feet closest to a structure will be the highest water use area in the firewise landscape. This is an area where highly flammable fuels are kept to a minimum and plants are kept green throughout the fire season — use well-irrigated perennials or low growing or non-woody deciduous plants here. Lawn is practical as a wildfire safety feature, but extensive areas of turfgrass may not be right for everyone. Good alternatives include clover, groundcovers, and conservation grasses that are kept green during the fire season. Rock mulches, patios, masonry, or rock planters are excellent fuel breaks and increase wildfire safety. Be creative with boulders, riprap, dry streambeds and sculptural inorganic elements.

When designing a landscape for fire safety remember — less is better. Simplify visual lines and groupings. A firewise landscape lets plants and garden elements reveal their innate beauty by leaving space

between plants and groups of plants. In firescaping, open space is more important than the plants.



Lawn can be an effective landscape feature in a FireWise landscape.

# OTHER CONSIDERATIONS IN MAKING YOUR HOME DEFENSIBLE

How a house is designed, where it is built, materials used in its construction and landscape, and access to the home all influence survivability during wildfire. Below are recommendations and an illustration modified from Colorado State Forest Service's publication "Are You Firewise?" These recommendations will make a home much easier to defend and will improve its chances of surviving a wildfire.

## 1. ROOF

- Remove dead branches hanging over your roof.
- Remove any branches within 15 feet of your chimney.
- Clean all dead leaves and needles from your roof and gutters.
- Install a roof that meets the fire resistance classification of "Class C" or better. Local jurisdictions may require a higher fire resistance rating. Check your county regulations or with your local fire department.
- Cover your chimney outlet and stovepipe with a nonflammable screen of one-half inch or smaller mesh.

## 2. CONSTRUCTION

- Build your home away from ridge tops, canyons and areas between high points on a ridge.
- Build your home at least 30 feet from your property line.
- Use fire resistant building materials.
- Enclose the underside of balconies and above-ground decks with fire resistant materials.
- Limit the size and number of windows in your home that face large areas of vegetation.
- Install only dual-paned or triple-paned windows.
- Consider sprinkler systems within the house. They may protect your home while you're away or prevent a house fire from spreading into the wildlands.

## 3. LANDSCAPE

- See "Creating An Effective Defensible Space" and "Firescape - Firewise Landscape Design."

## 4. YARD

- Stack woodpiles at least 30 feet from all structures and clear away flammable vegetation within 10 feet of woodpiles.
- Locate LPG tanks (butane and propane) at least 30 feet from any structure and surround them with 10 feet of clearance.
- Remove all stacks of construction materials, pine needles, leaves and other debris from your yard.
- Contact your local fire department to see if open burning is allowed in your area; if so, obtain a permit before burning debris.
- Where burn barrels are allowed, clear flammable materials at least 10 feet around the barrel; cover the open top with a non-flammable screen with mesh no larger than one-quarter inch.

## 5. EMERGENCY WATER SUPPLY

- Maintain an emergency water supply that meets fire department standards through one of the following:
  - a community water/hydrant system and/or
  - a cooperative emergency storage tank with neighbors and/or
  - a minimum storage supply of 2,500 gallons on your property
- Clearly mark all emergency water sources and notify your local fire department of their location.
- Create easy firefighter access to your closest emergency water source.

- If your water comes from a well, consider an emergency generator to operate the pump during a power failure.

## 6. ACCESS

- Identify at least two exit routes from your neighborhood.
- Construct roads that allow two way traffic.
- Design road width, grade and curves to allow access for large emergency vehicles.
- Construct driveways to allow large emergency equipment to reach your house.
- Design bridges to carry heavy emergency vehicles, including bulldozers carried on large trucks.
- Post clear road signs to show traffic restrictions such as dead-end roads, and weight and height limitations.
- Make sure dead-end roads and long driveways have turnaround areas wide enough for emergency vehicles. Construct turnouts along one-way roads.
- Clear flammable vegetation at least 10 feet from roads and five feet from driveways.
- Cut back overhanging tree branches above roads.
- Construct fire barriers, such as greenbelts, parks, golf courses and athletic fields.
- Make sure that your street is named or numbered, and a sign is visibly posted at each street intersection.
- Make sure that your street name and house number are not duplicated elsewhere in the county.
- Post your house address at the beginning of your driveway, or on your house if it is easily visible from the road.

## 7. OUTSIDE

- Designate an emergency meeting place outside your home.
- Practice emergency exit drills regularly.
- Make sure that electric service lines, fuse boxes and circuit breaker panels are installed and maintained as prescribed by code.
- Contact qualified individuals to perform electrical maintenance and repairs.

## FIRE BRANDS AND THE WOOD SHAKE ROOF HAZARD

Firebrands are burning embers produced by wildfire which are lifted high into the air and carried beyond the fire front. Firebrands are one of the major causes of homes burned due to wildfire.

Typical firebrand materials include pine cones, bark, and if houses are involved, wood shakes and shingles. Depending on wind speed and size of materials, firebrands can be carried more than one-half mile ahead of the fire front.

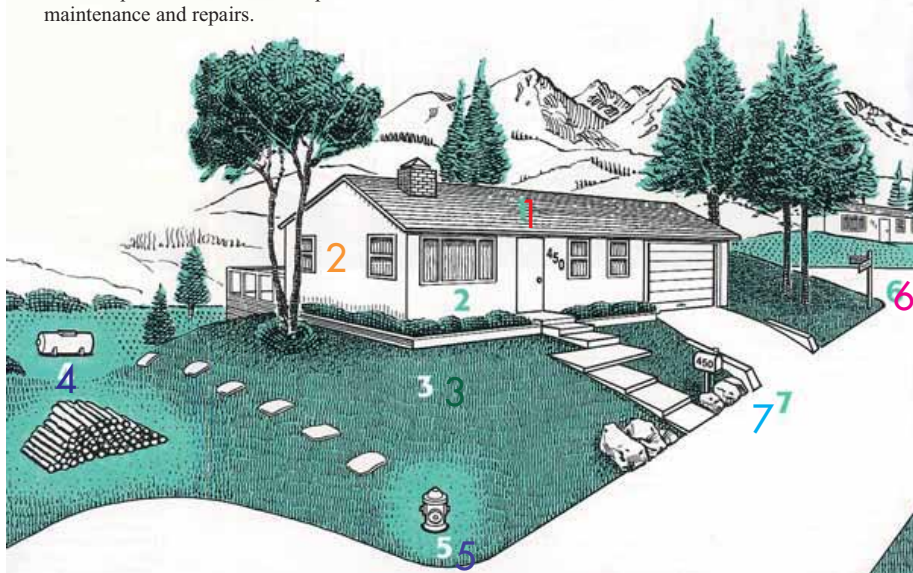
A shower of thousands of firebrands can be produced during a major wildfire event. If these firebrands land in areas with easily ignited fuels, numerous spot fires can start. Homes located blocks away from the main fire front can be threatened.

A house can be threatened by a wildfire in three ways: direct exposure from flames, radiated heat, and airborne firebrands. Of these, firebrands account for the majority of homes burned by wildfire. The roof of the house is the most vulnerable to firebrands.

Because of its angle, the roof can catch and trap firebrands. If the roof is constructed of combustible materials such as untreated wood shakes and shingles, the house is in jeopardy of igniting and burning.

Not only are combustible roofing materials a hazard to the structure on which they are installed, but they also pose a threat to other houses in the vicinity. Burning wood shakes can become firebrands, be lifted from the burning roof, and carried blocks away, and land in receptive fuel beds such as other combustible roofs.

Unfortunately for homeowners with existing combustible roofs, there are no long-term reliable measures available to reduce roof vulnerability to wildfire other than re-roofing with fire resistant materials.



# WHEN WILDFIRE APPROACHES

Should homes be threatened by wildfire, occupants may be advised to evacuate to protect them from life-threatening situations. Homeowners, however, do have the right to stay on their properties if they so desire and as long as their activities do not hinder fire fighting efforts. If occupants are not contacted in time to evacuate or if owners decide to stay with their homes, these suggestions will help them protect their properties and families.

- Evacuate, if possible, all family members not essential to protecting the house. Evacuate pets as well.
- Contact a friend or relative and relay your plans.
- Make sure family members are aware of a prearranged meeting place.
- Tune into a local radio station and listen for instructions.
- Place vehicles in the garage, facing out. Roll up windows.
- Place valuable papers and mementos in the car.
- Close the garage door, but leave it unlocked. If applicable, disconnect the electric garage door opener so that the door can be opened manually.
- Place combustible patio furniture in the house or garage.
- Shut off propane at the tank or natural gas at the meter.
- Wear only cotton or wool clothes. Proper attire includes long pants, long sleeved shirt or jacket, and boots. Carry gloves, a handkerchief to cover face, water to drink, and goggles.
- Close all exterior vents.
- Prop a ladder against the house so firefighters have easy access to the roof.
- Make sure that all garden hoses are connected to faucets and attach a nozzle set on "spray."
- Soak rags, towels, or small rugs with water to use in beating out embers or small fires.
- Inside, fill bathtubs, sinks, and other containers with water. Outside, do the same with garbage cans and buckets. Remember that the water heater and toilet tank are available sources of water.



- Close all exterior doors and windows.
- Close all interior doors.
- Open the fireplace damper, but place the screen over the hearth to prevent sparks and embers from entering the house.
- Leave a light on in each room.
- Remove lightweight and/or non-fire resistant curtains and other combustible materials from around windows.
- If available, close fire resistant drapes, shutters, or venetian blinds. Attach pre-cut plywood panels to the exterior of windows and glass doors.
- Turn off all pilot lights.
- Move overstuffed furniture (e.g. couches, easy chairs, etc.) to the center of the room.
- Keep wood shake or shingle roofs moist by spraying water. Do not waste water. Consider placing a lawn sprinkler on the roof if water pressure is adequate. Do not turn on until burning embers begin to fall on the roof.
- Continually check the roof and attic for embers, smoke, or fire.

If a fire should occur within the house, contact the fire department immediately. Continue to inspect your house and property for embers and smoke.

**Most importantly, STAY CALM!**

## OUTDOOR FIRE SAFETY TIPS



### Charcoal Briquets

After using the burning charcoal briquets, "dunk 'em!" Don't sprinkle. Soak the coals with lots of water; stir them and soak again. Be sure they are out - cold! Carefully feel the coals with your bare hands to be sure.

### Campfires

Build campfires away from overhanging branches, steep slopes, rotten stumps, logs, dry grass, and leaves. Keep plenty of water handy and have a shovel for throwing dirt on the fire if it gets out of control.

Never leave a fire unattended! Even a small breeze could quickly cause a fire to spread.



Drown the fire with water. Make sure all embers, coals, and sticks are wet. Move rocks - there may be burning embers underneath.

Stir the remains, add more water and stir again. Be sure all burned material has been extinguished and cooled. If you do not have water, use dirt. Mix enough soil or sand with the embers. Continue adding and

stirring until all material is cooled.

Feel all materials with your bare hand. Make sure that no roots are burning. Do not bury your coals - they can smolder and break out.



## Check out these websites for further information:

**Colorado State Forest Service**  
<http://lamar.colostate.edu/~firewise>

**Firewise**  
<http://www.firewise.org>

**USFS Rocky Mountain Region**  
<http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/fire/rmacc.html>

**Bureau of Land Management**  
<http://www.blm.gov>

**FEMA**  
<http://www.fema.gov/reg-viii>

**National Interagency Fire Center**  
<http://www.nifc.gov>

**Smokey Bear**  
<http://www.smokeybear.com>

**Fire Safe Council**  
<http://www.firesafecouncil.org>

**American Red Cross**  
<http://www.redcross.org>



*High Meadows Fire, Jefferson County, June 12, 2000. 58 homes destroyed.*

**Remember, a little extra care takes only a few minutes of your time. And it could prevent a wildfire.**