

There are two kinds of fire we need to prepare against here in Pullman - wildfires and structure fires. The wildland fire season in Washington usually begins in early July and typically culminates in late September with a moisture event; however, wildland fires have occurred in every month of the year. Drought, snow pack, and local weather conditions can expand the length of the fire season. Structure fires also occur throughout the year, but there is an increase during the colder months due to increased use of fireplaces and other heating elements.

Below is some information on wildfires and structure fires taken from the [Federal Emergency Management Agency \(FEMA\)](#) website. Additional information and resources for handling fire emergencies can be found at:

- [Pullman Fire Department](#)
- [Washington State Emergency Management Division](#)
- [U.S. Fire Administration](#)

### **Wildfires**

- [Prepare for a Wildfire](#)
- [What to do Before a Wildfire](#)
- [What to do During a Wildfire](#)
- [What to do After a Wildfire](#)

### **Structure Fires**

- [What to do Before a Structure Fire](#)
- [What to do During a Structure Fire](#)
- [What to do After a Structure Fire](#)

---

## **Prepare for a Wildfire**

Listed here are several suggestions that you can implement immediately. Others need to be considered at the time of construction or remodeling. You should also contact your local fire department, forestry office, emergency management office or building department for information about local fire laws, building codes and protection measures. Obtain local building codes and weed abatement ordinances for structures built near wooded areas.

### Find Out What Your Fire Risk Is

Learn about the history of wildfire in your area. Be aware of recent weather. A long period without rain increases the risk of wildfire. Consider having a professional inspect your property and offer recommendations for reducing the wildfire risk. Determine your community's ability to respond to wildfire. Are roads leading to your property clearly marked? Are the roads wide enough to allow firefighting equipment to get through? Is your house number visible from the roadside?

### Learn and teach safe fire practices.

- Build fires away from nearby trees or bushes.
- Always have a way to extinguish the fire quickly and completely.
- Install smoke detectors on every level of your home and near sleeping areas.
- Never leave a fire--even a cigarette--burning unattended.
- Avoid open burning completely, and especially during dry season.
- Always be ready for an emergency evacuation.

Evacuation may be the only way to protect your family in a wildfire. Know where to go and what to bring with you. You should plan several escape routes in case roads are blocked by a wildfire.

### Create Safety Zones Around Your Home

All vegetation is fuel for a wildfire, though some trees and shrubs are more flammable than others. To reduce the risk, you will need to modify or eliminate brush, trees and other vegetation near your home. The greater the distance is between your home and the vegetation, the greater the protection.

**Create a 30-foot safety zone around the house.** Keep the volume of vegetation in this zone to a minimum. If you live on a hill, extend the zone on the downhill side. Fire spreads rapidly uphill. The steeper the slope, the more open space you will need to protect your home. Swimming pools and patios can be a safety zone and stone walls can act as heat shields and deflect flames. In this zone, you should also do the following:

- Remove vines from the walls of the house.

- Move shrubs and other landscaping away from the sides of the house.
- Prune branches and shrubs within 15 feet of chimneys and stove pipes.
- Remove tree limbs within 15 feet of the ground.
- Thin a 15-foot space between tree crowns.
- Replace highly flammable vegetation such as pine, eucalyptus, junipers and fir trees with lower growing, less flammable species. Check with your local fire department or garden store for suggestions.
- Replace vegetation that has living or dead branches from the ground-level up (these act as ladder fuels for the approaching fire).
- Cut the lawn often keeping the grass at a maximum of 2 inches. Watch grass and other vegetation near the driveway, a source of ignition from automobile exhaust systems.
- Clear the area of leaves, brush, evergreen cones, dead limbs and fallen trees.

**Create a second zone at least 100 feet around the house.**□ This zone should begin about 30 feet from the house and extend to at least 100 feet. In this zone, reduce or replace as much of the most flammable vegetation as possible. If you live on a hill, you may need to extend the zone for several hundred feet to provide the desired level of safety.

- Clear all combustibles within 30 feet of any structure.
- Install electrical lines underground, if possible
- Ask the power company to clear branches from power lines.
- Avoid using bark and wood chip mulch
- Stack firewood 100 feet away and uphill from any structure.
- Store combustible or flammable materials in approved safety containers and keep them away from the house.
- Keep the gas grill and propane tank at least 15 feet from any structure. Clear an area 15 feet around the grill. Place a 1/4 inch mesh screen over the grill. Always use the grill cautiously but refrain from using it all during high risk times.

## Protect Your Home

### Remove debris from under sun decks and porches.

Any porch, balcony or overhang with exposed space underneath is fuel for an approaching fire. Overhangs ignite easily by flying embers and by the heat and fire that get trapped underneath. If vegetation is allowed to grow underneath or if the space is used for storage, the hazard is increased significantly. Clear leaves, trash and other combustible materials away from underneath sun decks and porches. Extend 1/2-inch mesh screen from all overhangs down to the ground. Enclose wooden stilts with non-combustible material such as concrete, brick, rock, stucco or metal. Use non-combustible patio furniture and covers. If you're planning a porch or sun deck, use non-combustible or fire-resistant materials. If possible, build the structure to the ground so that there is no space underneath.

### **Enclose eaves and overhangs.**

Like porches and balconies, eaves trap the heat rising along the exterior siding. Enclose all eaves to reduce the hazard.

### **Cover house vents with wire mesh.**

Any attic vent, soffit vent, louver or other opening can allow embers and flaming debris to enter a home and ignite it. Cover all openings with 1/4 inch or smaller corrosion-resistant wire mesh. If you're designing louvers, place them in the vertical wall rather than the soffit of the overhang.

### **Install spark arrestors in chimneys and stovepipes.**

Chimneys create a hazard when embers escape through the top. To prevent this, install spark arrestors on all chimneys, stovepipes and vents for fuel-burning heaters. Use spark arrestors made of 12-gauge welded or woven wire mesh screen with openings 1/2 inch across. Ask your fire department for exact specifications. If you're building a chimney, use non-combustible materials and make sure the top of the chimney is at least two feet higher than any obstruction within 10 feet of the chimney. Keep the chimney clean.

### **Use fire resistant siding.**

Use fire resistant materials in the siding of your home, such as stucco, metal, brick, cement shingles, concrete and rock. You can treat wood siding with UL-approved fire retardant chemicals, but the treatment and protection are not permanent.

### **Choose safety glass for windows and sliding glass doors.**

Windows allow radiated heat to pass through and ignite combustible materials inside. The larger the pane of glass, the more vulnerable it is to fire. Dual- or triple-pane thermal glass, and fire resistant shutters or drapes, help reduce the wildfire risk. You can also install non-combustible awnings to shield windows and use shatter-resistant glazing such as tempered or wireglass.

**Prepare for water storage;** develop an external water supply such as a small pond, well or pool.

**Other safety measures to consider at the time of construction or remodeling.**

- Choose locations wisely; canyon and slope locations increase the risk of exposure to wildland fires.
- Use fire-resistant materials when building, renovating, or retrofitting structures.
- Avoid designs that include wooden decks and patios.
- Use non-combustible materials for the roof.
- The roof is especially vulnerable in a wildfire. Embers and flaming debris can travel great distances, land on your roof and start a new fire. Avoid flammable roofing materials such as wood, shake and shingle. Materials that are more fire resistant include single ply membranes, fiberglass shingles, slate, metal, clay and concrete tile. Clear gutters of leaves and debris.

[Back to Top](#)

---

## Wildfires

More and more people are making their homes in woodland settings - in or near forests, rural areas, or remote mountain sites. There, homeowners enjoy the beauty of the environment but face the very real danger of wildfire.

Every year across our Nation, some homes survive - while many others do not - after a major wildfire. Those that survive almost always do so because their owners had prepared for the eventuality of fire, which is an inescapable force of nature in fire-prone wildland areas. Said in another way - if it's predictable, it's preventable!

Wildfires often begin unnoticed. They spread quickly, igniting brush, trees, and homes. Reduce your risk by preparing now - before wildfire strikes. Meet with your family to decide what to do and where to go if wildfires threaten your area. Follow the steps listed below to protect your family, home, and property

[Back to Top](#)

---

## What to do Before a Wildfire

If you see a wildfire, call 9-1-1. Don't assume that someone else has already called. Describe the location of the fire, speak slowly and clearly, and answer any questions asked by the dispatcher.

### Before the Fire Approaches Your House

- Evacuate. Evacuate your pets and all family members who are not essential to preparing the home. Anyone with medical or physical limitations and the young and the elderly should be evacuated immediately.
- Wear Protective Clothing.
- Remove Combustibles. Clear items that will burn from around the house, including wood piles, lawn furniture, barbecue grills, tarp coverings, etc. Move them outside of your defensible space.
- Close/Protect Openings. Close outside attic, eaves and basement vents, windows, doors, pet doors, etc. Remove flammable drapes and curtains. Close all shutters, blinds or heavy non-combustible window coverings to reduce radiant heat.
- Close Inside Doors/Open Damper. Close all doors inside the house to prevent draft. Open the damper on your fireplace, but close the fireplace screen.
- Shut Off Gas. Shut off any natural gas, propane or fuel oil supplies at the source.
- Water. Connect garden hoses. Fill any pools, hot tubs, garbage cans, tubs or other large containers with water.
- Pumps. If you have gas-powered pumps for water, make sure they are fueled and ready.
- Ladder. Place a ladder against the house in clear view.
- Car. Back your car into the driveway and roll up the windows.
- Garage Doors. Disconnect any automatic garage door openers so that doors can still be opened by hand if the power goes out. Close all garage doors.
- Valuables. Place valuable papers, mementos and anything "you can't live without" inside the car in the garage, ready for quick departure. Any pets still with you should also be put in the car.

#### Preparing to Leave

- Lights. Turn on outside lights and leave a light on in every room to make the house more visible in heavy smoke.
- Don't Lock Up. Leave doors and windows closed but unlocked. It may be necessary for firefighters to gain quick entry into your home to fight fire. The entire area will be isolated and patrolled by sheriff's deputies or police.

[Back to Top](#)

---

## **What to do During a Wildfire**

### **Survival in a Vehicle**

This is dangerous and should only be done in an emergency, but you can survive the firestorm if you stay in your car. It is much less dangerous than trying to run from a fire on foot.

- Roll up windows and close air vents. Drive slowly with headlights on. Watch for other vehicles and pedestrians. Do not drive through heavy smoke.
- If you have to stop, park away from the heaviest trees and brush. Turn headlights on and ignition off. Roll up windows and close air vents.
- Get on the floor and cover up with a blanket or coat.
- Stay in the vehicle until the main fire passes.
- Stay in the car. Do not run! Engine may stall and not restart. Air currents may rock the car. Some smoke and sparks may enter the vehicle. Temperature inside will increase. Metal gas tanks and containers rarely explode.

### **If You Are Trapped at Home**

If you do find yourself trapped by wildfire inside your home, stay inside and away from outside walls. Close doors, but leave them unlocked. Keep your entire family together and remain calm.

### **If Caught in the Open**

- The best temporary shelter is in a sparse fuel area. On a steep mountainside, the back side is safer. Avoid canyons, natural "chimneys" and saddles.
- If a road is nearby, lie face down along the road cut or in the ditch on the uphill side. Cover yourself with anything that will shield you from the fire's heat.
- If hiking in the back country, seek a depression with sparse fuel. Clear fuel away from the area while the fire is approaching and then lie face down in the depression and cover yourself. Stay down until after the fire passes!

[Back to Top](#)

---

### What to do After a Wildfire

- Check the roof immediately. Put out any roof fires, sparks or embers. Check the attic for hidden burning sparks.
- If you have a fire, get your neighbors to help fight it.
- The water you put into your pool or hot tub and other containers will come in handy now. If the power is out, try connecting a hose to the outlet on your water heater.
- For several hours after the fire, maintain a "fire watch." Re-check for smoke and sparks throughout the house.

[Back to Top](#)

---

### Structure Fires

Each year, more than 4,000 Americans die and more than 25,000 are injured in fires, many of which could be prevented. Direct property loss due to fires is estimated at \$8.6 billion annually.

To protect yourself, it is important to understand the basic characteristics of fire. Fire spreads quickly; there is no time to gather valuables or make a phone call. In just two minutes, a fire can become life-threatening. In five minutes, a residence can be engulfed in flames.

Heat and smoke from fire can be more dangerous than the flames. Inhaling the super-hot air can sear your lungs. Fire produces poisonous gases that make you disoriented and drowsy. Instead of being awakened by a fire, you may fall into a deeper sleep. Asphyxiation is the leading cause of fire deaths, exceeding burns by a three-to-one ratio.

[Back to Top](#)

---

### What to do Before a Fire

The following are things you can do to protect yourself, your family, and your property in the



event of a fire:

### Smoke Alarms

- Install smoke alarms. Properly working smoke alarms decrease your chances of dying in a fire by half.
- Place smoke alarms on every level of your residence. Place them outside bedrooms on the ceiling or high on the wall (4 to 12 inches from ceiling), at the top of open stairways, or at the bottom of enclosed stairs and near (but not in) the kitchen.
- Test and clean smoke alarms once a month and replace batteries at least once a year. Replace smoke alarms once every 10 years.

### Escaping the Fire

- Review escape routes with your family. Practice escaping from each room.
- Make sure windows are not nailed or painted shut. Make sure security gratings on windows have a fire safety opening feature so they can be easily opened from the inside.
- Consider escape ladders if your residence has more than one level, and ensure that burglar bars and other antitheft mechanisms that block outside window entry are easily opened from the inside.
- Teach family members to stay low to the floor (where the air is safer in a fire) when escaping from a fire.
- Clean out storage areas. Do not let trash, such as old newspapers and magazines, accumulate.

### Flammable Items

- Never use gasoline, benzine, naptha, or similar flammable liquids indoors.
- Store flammable liquids in approved containers in well-ventilated storage areas.
- Never smoke near flammable liquids.
- Discard all rags or materials that have been soaked in flammable liquids after you have used them. Safely discard them outdoors in a metal container.
- Insulate chimneys and place spark arresters on top. The chimney should be at least three feet higher than the roof. Remove branches hanging above and around the chimney.

## **Heating Sources**

- Be careful when using alternative heating sources.
- Check with your local fire department on the legality of using kerosene heaters in your community. Be sure to fill kerosene heaters outside, and be sure they have cooled.
  - Place heaters at least three feet away from flammable materials. Make sure the floor and nearby walls are properly insulated.
  - Use only the type of fuel designated for your unit and follow manufacturer's instructions.
  - Store ashes in a metal container outside and away from your residence.
  - Keep open flames away from walls, furniture, drapery, and flammable items.
  - Keep a screen in front of the fireplace.
  - Have heating units inspected and cleaned annually by a certified specialist.

## **Matches and Smoking**

- Keep matches and lighters up high, away from children, and, if possible, in a locked cabinet.
- Never smoke in bed or when drowsy or medicated. Provide smokers with deep, sturdy ashtrays. Douse cigarette and cigar butts with water before disposal.

## **Electrical Wiring**

- Have the electrical wiring in your residence checked by an electrician.
- Inspect extension cords for frayed or exposed wires or loose plugs.
- Make sure outlets have cover plates and no exposed wiring.
- Make sure wiring does not run under rugs, over nails, or across high-traffic areas.
- Do not overload extension cords or outlets. If you need to plug in two or three appliances, get a UL-approved unit with built-in circuit breakers to prevent sparks and short circuits.
- Make sure insulation does not touch bare electrical wiring.

## **Other Safety Tips**

- Sleep with your door closed.
- Install A-B-C-type fire extinguishers in your residence and teach family members how to use them.
- Consider installing an automatic fire sprinkler system in your residence.

- Ask your local fire department to inspect your residence for fire safety and prevention.

[Back to Top](#)

---

### What to do During a Fire

If your clothes catch on fire, you should:

- Stop, drop, and roll - until the fire is extinguished. Running only makes the fire burn faster.

To escape a fire, you should:

- Check closed doors for heat before you open them. If you are escaping through a closed door, use the back of your hand to feel the top of the door, the doorknob, and the crack between the door and door frame before you open it. Never use the palm of your hand or fingers to test for heat - burning those areas could impair your ability to escape a fire (i.e., ladders and crawling).

#### Hot Door

#### Cold Door

Do not open. Escape through a window. If you cannot escape, hang a white or light-colored sheet outside.

Open slowly and ensure fire and/or smoke is not blocking your escape route. If your escape route is blocked,

- Crawl low under any smoke to your exit - heavy smoke and poisonous gases collect first along the ceiling.
- Close doors behind you as you escape to delay the spread of the fire.
- Stay out once you are safely out. Do not reenter. Call 9-1-1.

[Back to Top](#)

---

### What to do After a Fire

The following are guidelines for different circumstances in the period following a fire:

- If you are with burn victims, or are a burn victim yourself, call 9-1-1; cool and cover burns to reduce chance of further injury or infection.
- If you detect heat or smoke when entering a damaged building, evacuate immediately.
- If you are a tenant, contact the landlord.
- If you have a safe or strong box, do not try to open it. It can hold intense heat for several hours. If the door is opened before the box has cooled, the contents could burst into flames.
  
- If you must leave your home because a building inspector says the building is unsafe, ask someone you trust to watch the property during your absence.

[Back to Top](#)

---

### Additional Resources

- [Pullman Fire Department](#)
- [Washington State Emergency Management Division](#)
- [U.S. Fire Administration for Citizens](#)

[Back to Top](#)

---