

### Wildfire Preparedness

When most of us in the west think of wildfires we tend to think of the large forest fires that seem to be a yearly occurrence in North-central Washington and Idaho. It is easy to fall into the "It's someone else's problem" train of thought. However, locally, we experience wildfire almost every year, albeit usually on a much smaller scale. Still, it is well worth taking time to prepare for the upcoming wildfire season and ensure that our homes are safe.

When discussing wildfire, it is important to consider how it may affect those of us who live in the city. In recent years a great deal of discussion in the fire service has focused on the "urban wildland interface". This is the name given the region where "nature meets development". Why is this area of particular importance? When fire starts in this region it has the ability to grow to large proportions because of the lack of fire breaks such as roads and trails. Also there is often larger than average fuel loads that can cause rapid fire spread. Dry grass, thistle, and brush can burn with characteristics similar to gasoline. These are referred to as "light and flashy" fuels. Ladder fuels, woody bushes, dead branches and small trees which allow a fire to "climb" into the tops of tall trees, are also frequently found here. Once in the crowns of trees fire can become extremely difficult to control.

A large portion of the residences within the City of Pullman are situated in the interface. Intuition may tell you that these areas are always going to be found on the outer edges of the city. This however is not the case. While the majority of the urban interface will be on the outskirts there are still regions inside the city limits which would be consider "urban interface". Park lands, undeveloped pockets of land, previously developed lots which have been abandoned, and steep hillsides which are un-buildable are several areas which could be considered wildland urban interface.

The key to creating a protective zone for your home is reducing the nearby fuel loads. Keep your lawn well watered and regularly mowed. Remove dead limbs and vegetation from the area surrounding your house. Cut limbs from trees in your yard up to approximately six feet and controlling weeds before they become a problem. Make sure to clean out your gutters regularly, dry leaves and pine needles are a perfect spot for a fire brand to land and start a roof on fire. And finally, do not store fire wood or other flammable items under decks which are attached to your home. This provides another excellent place for a fire to get a foot hold and increasing the fuel load in these locations can have disastrous consequence.

In our area there are two items of particular concern. The first are juniper bushes. These can be a nice addition to a home's landscaping however this highly flammable evergreen are frequently placed much too close to houses. This is a bush which should be kept well away from structures and used sparingly in landscapes. Second is the cotton "fluff" which is produced in the spring by cottonwood trees here on the Palouse. When this cotton fluff drifts into piles it can be act almost as a fuse. If a spark or cigarette ignites the fluff it will rapidly burn and possibly ignite other nearby debris. Simply sweeping up the cotton, or wetting it with a hose can easily eliminate this hazard.

Taking a few easy steps now may dramatically reduce the risk of fire as we transition from spring to summer. If you'd like more information on protecting your home from wildfire, visit [www.firewise.org](http://www.firewise.org) or contact your Pullman Fire Department at (509) 332-8172.

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