



The Good, the Bad and the FIREWISE

By Gwen Holt and Diana Olszowy

People love living in woodland communities. They love having trees, wildlife and recreational opportunities accessible from their own back door. Unfortunately, woodlands and wildfires come as a package deal, and each year many homes and businesses are threatened or destroyed. If you live in or are planning to move to areas where homes are intermixed with woodlands, also known as the wildland urban interface (WUI), your home, life and the lives of your family members may be in jeopardy due to increased wildfire risk.

Conditions must be right for a wildland fire to start and spread. Firefighters recognize three factors that can influence fire behavior: weather, topography, and fuels. These components affect the likelihood of a wildland fire starting, the speed and direction of its spread, the intensity at which it burns, and the ability to control and extinguish it. Dry, hot, and windy weather increases the likelihood of wildfires. These conditions make ignition easier, allow fuels to burn more rapidly, and increase fire intensity. Topography, or the lay of the land, plays a major part in how fast a fire spreads. Steep slopes are the greatest topographical influence on fire behavior. As the steepness of slope increases, fire spreads more quickly. A home at the top of a fuel-covered slope is in greater jeopardy than one on flat ground or at the base of the slope. South and southwest-facing slopes usually have more intense fires.

Fuel is required for any fire to burn. Fuels consist of living vegetation (trees, shrubs, and grasses) and dead plant material (pine needles, dead trees, and fallen branches). The amount, size, moisture content, arrangement, and other fuel characteristics influence ease of ignition, rate of fire spread, length of flames and other fire behaviors.

A home in a woodland setting is surrounded by flammable fuels. You can minimize the wildfire threat to your home and family by making your home and property fire-wise. The following is a short list of simple actions you can take to reduce the likelihood of a wildfire damaging your property.

Action Steps to Make Your Home Firewise

1. Create a defensible space of at least 30 feet surrounding your home by reducing the amount of fuel from shrubs, dead plant material and firewood. This area should have fire-resistance vegetation that is healthy and green for most of the year.
2. If building or remodeling a home, use fire-resistant exterior wall materials that resist heat and flames, such as concrete, plaster, stucco and concrete masonry. Double-pane glass windows can make a home more resistant to wildland fire heat and flames. Although some vinyl will not burn, some vinyl soffits will melt, allowing embers into the attic space.



Homes with nonflammable roofs such as this metal one are more likely to survive a wildfire than those without defensible space and flammable roofs.

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Are you Firewise?



3. Use fire-resistant materials such as Class-A shingles, tile, or metal. Additionally, the inclusion of a fire-resistant subroof adds protection.

4. With fire-resistant landscaping, you can create defensible space around your home that reduces wildfire risk. Large, leafy hardwood trees should be pruned so that the lowest branches are at least six to 10 feet high to prevent a fire on the ground from spreading up to the treetops. Within the defensible space, remove flammable plants such as eastern red cedar, pine, and holly.

5. Identify your home/neighborhood with legible and clearly marked street names and numbers so emergency vehicles can rapidly find the location of the emergency. Include a driveway that is at least 12 feet wide with a vertical clearance of 15 feet to provide access for emergency vehicles.

6. Any structure that is attached to your home such as decks, porches, or fences should be made of fire-resistant material. Do not allow leaves

and other debris to accumulate under the deck or porch. If the attachment is not fire-resistant, then the home as a whole is not fire-resistant.

7. Liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) tanks should be far enough away from buildings for valves to be shut off. Keep area clear of flammable vegetation.

8. Develop a fire emergency plan and discuss what actions will be necessary to ensure the safety of your family.

For more information about Firewise practices, visit the Kentucky Firewise Web site at <http://www.forestry.ky.gov/programs/firewise/>

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