



# Protect Your Property from Wildfire

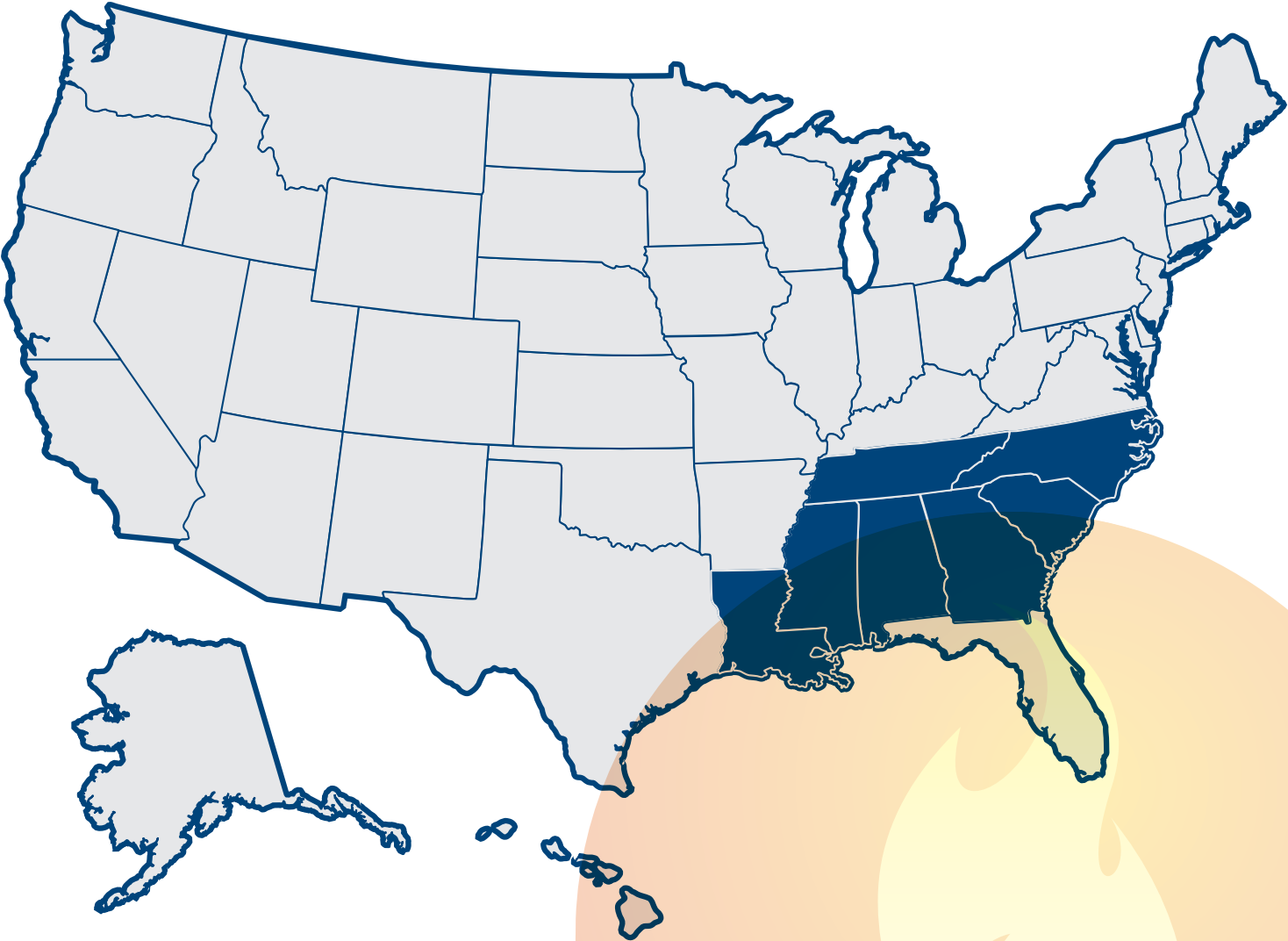


**Insurance  
Institute for  
Business &  
Home  
Safety**



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## YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Abnormally dry conditions in the Southeastern United States have left the abundant vegetation common in this area increasingly vulnerable to wildfires. A growing number of larger and more destructive fires have prompted many property owners to look for solutions to reduce the risk of damage to houses and businesses. This guide was created for the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee. It takes into account regional building styles and construction materials, common topographical characteristics and weather patterns, and other risk factors identified by fire science research. While wildfire protection begins with the individual, this research proves that a community-wide approach to fire protection is the most effective, so please share this guide with neighbors and friends. If something combustible is located within a 100-foot perimeter of your house or business (including your neighbor's house, business, surroundings or landscaping), it could potentially increase your risk of wildfire damage. Everyone benefits from a wildfire-adaptive community.

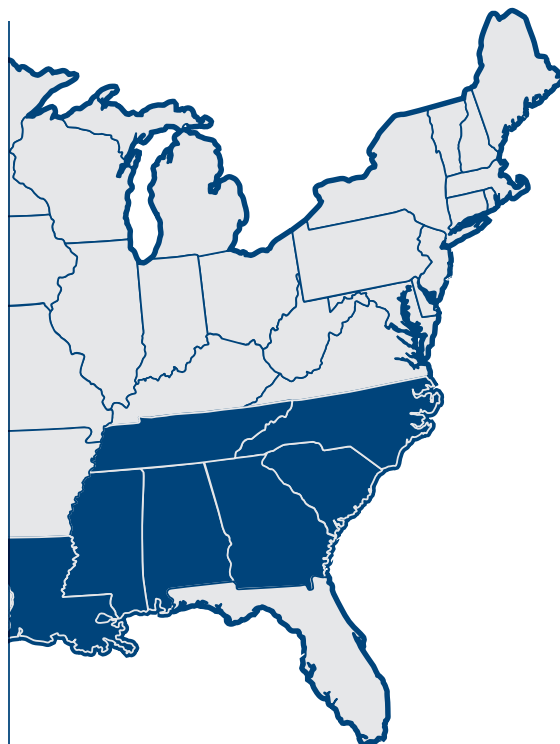
Wildfire research has shown that individuals and families can protect their property against wildfires by addressing three clear sources of vulnerability: the house or business itself, the landscaping nearby, and the general vegetation in the area surrounding the structure. Each of these sources can be dealt with through maintenance, material and design improvements, and vegetation control. Many of these projects are affordable and can be done over a weekend. Some of the projects have an additional financial benefit -- they can help improve energy efficiency.

### UNDERSTANDING EFFECTIVE WILDFIRE PROTECTION

Wildfires are called wild for a reason - they are often uncontrollable. What is controllable, however, is the preparation you can undertake to protect your house or business from damage and losses when a wildfire threatens. Ultimately, the difference between survival and destruction is whether some part of the structure catches on fire. A number of features, materials and design details can make your house or business vulnerable to a wildfire. Additionally, the surrounding forested areas and vegetation near your house or business can provide a pathway for fire and heat to get close enough to ignite the structure. There also is a chance that embers from a fire a mile or more away may fall onto the house or business, nearby vegetation or secondary buildings and cause them to ignite.

### MANAGING YOUR HOUSE OR BUSINESS

The most vulnerable part of a house or business is the roof. If you have a flammable roof, almost anything else you do will be of little consequence in reducing the chances the structure will burn when a wildfire approaches. Other key risk factors include vents, which can allow embers to enter the attic; fences and decks that can ignite and bring a fire right up to the house or business; single-pane windows, which can shatter in extreme heat from wildfire conditions and allow flames and embers inside; and debris, which collects in gutters and





in various locations along the roof and wall lines. This guide provides ideas for how you can reduce the ignition risks by making improvements to your house or business.

## DEFENSIBLE SPACE: MANAGING VEGETATION AND FUEL SOURCES AROUND YOUR HOUSE OR BUSINESS

Fire officials recommend a vegetation management zone around your house or business of at least 100 feet or more, depending on the type of vegetation in the adjacent wildland or forested areas and the slope of the land around the structure. The actions you take to modify the vegetation in this area are intended to reduce the severity of the fire. This also reduces the chances that flames will come into direct contact with any part of the house or business and keeps high-intensity flames away from bringing heat strong enough to break windows or cause other surfaces to ignite. Regardless of the size of the land surrounding a house or business, the goal is the same – to reduce the amount of fuel that can bring a wildfire dangerously close. This zone is widely referred to as defensible space. It can help stop the flames from a wildfire from reaching your house or business and also creates a safer area for firefighters to defend the structure.

## IMPROVING YOUR STRUCTURE'S WILDFIRE RESISTANCE

You probably already have a list of improvement and maintenance projects, both large and small. Maybe you need a new roof, want to replace old windows or doors with energy-efficient models or need to rebuild a deck or porch. Review your list to see if it includes projects in any of the following building-related sections. If so, by slightly modifying your project plans, you may be able to simultaneously improve the condition of the structure, add to its value and reduce your risk of wildfire damage. You also may decide to add new projects to that list which can provide vital protection against wildfire and, in some cases, save money on energy bills.

# ROOF

## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Replacing a roof is a major project, but it also yields major benefits. The roof should be the top priority. Research has shown that combustible roof coverings are the greatest threat to a building during a wildfire. Roof combustibility is described by a UL (Underwriters Laboratory) rating system – with Class “A” being the least combustible and most resistant to wildfire. Roof shape and design also play an important role. Take a careful look at your roof. The most fire-safe roof is a simple one. If you have a lot of ridges and valleys, or roof segments that intersect with the walls of the house, you have a complex roof. This makes your house or business more vulnerable to wildfires. Even if you have a Class “A” roof, vegetative debris can readily accumulate at the





intersections and so can burning embers. When the resulting fire is next to combustible siding or a dormer window it can cause the entire building to ignite.

Even if you have a noncombustible roof covering, inspect it carefully for broken pieces or gaps. Broken pieces can occur anywhere on the roof. Larger gaps are more likely at the ridge and edges. These openings will allow for debris to accumulate and embers to ignite.

## WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

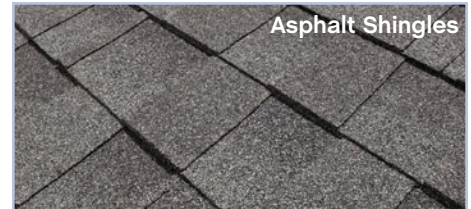
It can be difficult to tell whether you have a Class “A” fire-rated roof, unless it’s made of an obviously noncombustible material, such as tile. If you are not sure, schedule a professional roof inspection. If you replace your roof, choose a Class “A” rated roof, and completely remove the old covering.

Regardless of the specific Class “A” or noncombustible roofing material that you choose, inspect it regularly, maintain it and replace it when needed.

Keep your roof clean of debris. It will be difficult to observe debris that penetrates and accumulates behind gaps in the roofing. It will be important that you plug these gaps.

Here are some things to keep in mind when choosing a Class “A” roof covering:

- Many roof coverings have a Class “A” rating based only on the top/external part of the roof that you can see. Some examples include asphalt composition fiberglass shingles, steel roofs, and clay or concrete tiles. Asphalt composition shingles can also use organic fibers instead of fiberglass, which would result in a Class “C” rating.
- Other roof coverings obtain their Class “A” rating because additional materials are used in the roof assembly to enhance fire resistance. The roof assembly is the underneath the part of the roof that you can see. These coverings are considered “Class ‘A’ ‘by assembly.’” Examples include aluminum and some newer composite roofs made from recycled plastic and rubber materials, which require another layer of noncombustible materials to achieve a Class “A” rating. Wood shakes also are now available with pressure-impregnated, exterior-rated, fire-retardant chemicals that provide a Class “B” fire rating, and a “Class ‘A’ ‘by assembly.’”
- It is important to note that the roofing products and assemblies are new when they receive their fire rating. One exception is wood shakes, which are subjected to either a natural or accelerated weathering protocol prior to the standard roof fire test. As the roofing products weather, both wood shake and shingle roofs, may become more vulnerable to fire.



Wood shake roofs are now available with chemical treatments that provide a Class “B” fire rating.

Asphalt shingles are available with Class “A” fire ratings, but also may use organic fibers that can result in a Class “C” rating with less fire resistance.

Tile roofs must be kept clear of debris and the ends blocked to avoid allowing embers to override the Class “A” fire rating abilities.



## EAVES, SOFFITS, ATTIC AND CRAWLSPACE OPENINGS

### WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Researchers have learned from post-fire surveys of buildings damaged and destroyed by wildfires that attic/roof and foundation vents are entry points for embers and flames. These findings also have been confirmed during other post-fire evaluations. Embers entering vents can ignite other materials that are located in these spaces. There also is a risk associated with the most common type of eave, known as open (or exposed) eave construction, which does not have vents. You have this type of construction if you can see the rafter tails from your roof framing on the exterior underside of your roof. If not properly installed, there can be gaps where the blocking and rafter tails intersect; as a result, wind-blown embers could become lodged there, igniting the wood members with the fire spreading to the rest of the house or business.

If you have an open foundation, debris can readily accumulate in the area under your house or business. Depending on the amount surface fuels, and clearing, fire can spread under the structure.

### WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

If you have vented openings into your attic or crawlspace, check for screening. At a minimum, these vents should be covered with 1/8-inch metal mesh screens (usually the finest mesh allowed by the building code).

Until very recently, 1/4-inch mesh screen was the minimum allowed by building codes, so the vents on most structures will have this size screening. Post-fire surveys have shown that embers large enough to cause ignitions can pass through 1/4- and even 1/8-inch mesh screening, so while screening will help reduce the risk of ember entry, it is not a perfect solution. Also, keep in mind that a finer mesh screen will require more maintenance to be kept free of debris. It is important to keep air flowing freely to help manage the moisture in your attic.

Property owners in every area vulnerable to wildfire can benefit from new vents being designed as a result of stricter building codes in California. Although these vents may not be required in your state, they are designed to offer enhanced protection by reducing the chance embers will enter your space. These products are currently in the testing and acceptance phase while test standards are being finalized. These vents typically incorporate a finer mesh secondary screen (i.e., one that is set back in the vent device), and other design features on the exterior side. Find a list of accepted vents at: <http://osfm.fire.ca.gov/>. Scroll down to the section titled Building Code Chapter 7A Wildfire Protection Information and CBC Chapter 7A Task Force.

If you have an open foundation, enclose it with a noncombustible material such as a fiber-cement product or metal sheathing. Make sure the crawlspace created by enclosing the foundation is adequately vented.

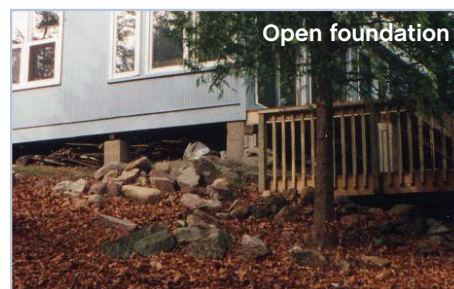
If you have open eaves (i.e., you can see the exposed rafters in the eave of your house or business), you can enclose the underside of the roof overhang to help keep embers from lodging there. To do this, fasten sheathing made from a noncombustible or fire-resistant material to the underside of the rafter tails. This enclosure can follow the slope of the roof, and is sometimes referred to as



Boxed eave with vent



Open eave



Open foundation



“boxing-in” the eave. This also can be accomplished by extending the material from the roof edge horizontally to the exterior wall, thereby making a soffit eave.

If you have a vented attic, do not forget to add soffit vents as part of your project – position the vents close to the roof edge, not the exterior wall.

If your vents are easily accessible, vent covers from a light weight material (such as sheet metal, or ½-inch plywood) could be prepared. These vent covers could then be installed as one of your evacuation preparation steps. These covers should be removed once the fire front passes.

## TILE AND OTHER NONCOMBUSTIBLE ROOF COVERINGS WITH GAPS ALONG THE EDGES

### WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Some roofing materials have a gap at the ridge and edge of the roof. The most common example is a clay barrel tile roof covering, but it also occurs in some metal roofs (mainly shingle-style) and other cement roof coverings. The gaps can allow birds and rodents to get into the opening and build nests. The small bits of vegetation used for nesting material are highly combustible, and easily ignited by wind-blown embers. The flames can then quickly spread to the structural members that support your roof and bypass any protection offered by Class “A” fire-rated roof covering materials.

Over time, wind-blown debris can accumulate under roofing that has even relatively narrow openings. The location of the roof openings could make it difficult to observe or remove the debris. This is why it is important to close off even small openings, given the ability of small embers to enter and ignite fine fuels.

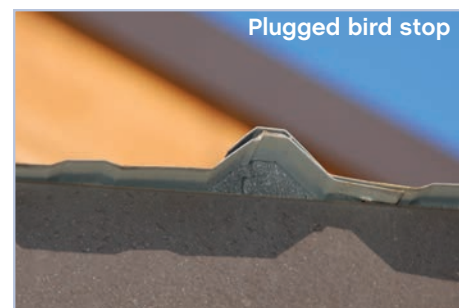
### WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

Use a form of protection called a bird stop to seal the open edges of the roof. Bird stops are a manufactured shield that can be purchased from roofing supply stores and are typically provided by the manufacturer of the roof covering. The bird stop is inserted into the opening at the edge of the roof. You can also use a mortar mix to plug the ends. The mortar mix would be the best option for openings at the ridge of the roof. Remember, the idea is to keep fuel sources, such as nesting materials, wind-blown debris, and embers from getting underneath the roof covering.

Do not forget to inspect the ridge or peak of the roof. A flat tile roof may not have a gap at the roof edge, but it could have openings at the ridge. These openings also need to be closed.



Flat tile



Plugged bird stop

Smaller gaps can occur in standing seam metal roofs. As shown here, material is also available to plug the ends of these roof coverings.



# GUTTERS

## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Wind-blown vegetative debris and overhanging trees can lead to the accumulation of leaves and needles on your roof and in your gutters. Once dry, this debris can be readily ignited by embers from a wildfire. Debris accumulates in gutters and at roof-to-wall intersections, making both particularly vulnerable to ignition by wind-blown embers. Even if you have a Class “A” fire-resistant roof covering, such as tile, concrete or asphalt composition shingles, the edge of the roof or, in the case of a multi-story building or one with dormers, the exterior siding adjacent to the roof will be exposed to flames from the ignited vegetative debris.

Many checklists suggest replacing vinyl gutters with metal gutters. Debris in any gutter will be readily ignited by embers. Depending somewhat on the amount of accumulated debris, a vinyl gutter will likely quickly detach from the fascia and fall to the ground. The debris will burn out on the ground, potentially igniting any other vegetation, or combustible siding. The metal gutter will remain attached to the fascia, and the ignited debris will burn out there, continuing the expose the edge of the roof. The most fire-safe solution is to minimize the build-up of debris in the gutter.

## WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

Remove tree branches that overhang the roof and remove any dead vegetation and include branches within your defensible space, the zone where you are actively managing your vegetation. This should be part of routine defensible space maintenance. Do this at least once each year, at a time best suited for the health of the tree or plant.

Clean gutters and roof areas where debris collects. Inspect these areas at least twice a year. Remove accumulated leaves, pine needles and any other combustible debris.

Covering your gutters with screens or other cover devices can minimize the build-up of debris. Remember that even gutters with screens should be inspected to make sure covers are still in place and performing properly. Some screens and cover devices will keep debris out of the gutter, but allow it to accumulate on the roof, behind the device. This can increase your vulnerability if you don’t have a Class “A” roof. Even if you have a Class “A” roof, debris should be removed on a regular basis to reduce ember generation and exposure to other building components.





## WINDOWS AND DOORS

### WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

The doors and windows of your house or business should be able to resist wind-blown embers and protect against radiant heat and flame exposure. Depending on the type of glass, a window that is exposed to flames may break after only 1 to 3 minutes of exposure to intense heat or flames. When windows break from exposure to heat and/or flames, embers and flames can get inside. Testing has shown that single-pane windows are highly vulnerable to breaking when exposed to wildfire conditions. Fortunately, dual-pane windows provide better protection; this protection is even greater when tempered glass is used. Remember, even dual-pane, tempered glass windows will not protect your house or business if they are left open. Close all windows before you evacuate during a wildfire.

Studies have shown that glass is the most vulnerable part of the window. Glass in windows breaks because of extreme temperature differences, which develop between the exposed glass and the glass protected by the window framing material, when exposed to the heat from a wildfire (or the heat from your neighbor's burning house or business). Cracks develop and propagate inward, which makes larger windows more vulnerable to breaking because they tend to have more edge than smaller windows.

Many property owners in hurricane-prone regions have been encouraged to install outward-opening doors. If an inward-opening door is still in place, interior corners can become collection points for debris. This debris accumulation combined with its close proximity to combustible siding can result in a more severe fire.

### WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

Determine what kind of windows are in your house or business. Single-pane windows are more common in older structures. Dual-pane windows have two sheets of glass that are separated by airspace. Regardless of which types of windows are in place, the key is to use tempered glass. To find out if your dual-pane windows contain tempered glass, look for an etching (called a "bug") in the corner that indicates it is tempered.

You should replace your single-pane windows with ones that have tempered glass, preferably dual-pane windows that have at least one pane of tempered glass on the outside. Remember, dual-pane windows without tempered glass don't protect as well in wildfire conditions. Current energy code requirements usually require dual-pane windows, upgrading will increase both fire-resistance and energy efficiency.

Metal screens are common in warmer climates and have been shown to improve the performance of windows subjected to radiant heat exposure in wildfire conditions. Fine mesh screens of at least 1/16-inch also will help to resist the entry of embers, but will not keep flames out.

If you cannot afford to replace your windows, it is important to manage the fuels close to your house or business, including maintaining the surrounding vegetation and using noncombustible mulch and ignition-resistant materials for yard structures. Once you have done this, and provided your windows are accessible, a less expensive alternative is to make shutters out of 1/2-inch



The outer pane of this dual-pane window broke during a 2007 wildfire. Having the dual-pane window was one reason why this home survived.

Tempered glass in a window will have a marking etched on one of the corners, similar to that shown here.



plywood. Cut them to size and label them for each window so they can be installed quickly when wildfire threatens. Take the time to pre-install the anchorage hardware and prepare your shutter materials in advance. The ½-inch plywood will provide an extra measure of protection from radiant heat or the impact of windblown embers.

## DECKS, PATIOS AND PORCHES

### WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Decks, patios and porches are important because they often are attached to the house or business and are next to windows, sliding glass doors, and possibly combustible siding. Consider the construction material used to build the deck, patio or porch, along with the types of items that are on and beneath it. This includes vegetation leading up to the structure, which can act as a wick and move the fire through to the building materials, igniting it and other items stored underneath or nearby. This is particularly important for decks when the house or business is sited on a sloped lot. Depending on the type and condition of the vegetation, flame lengths on a slope can reach more than 30 feet, so even an elevated deck can be vulnerable.

It is common knowledge that wood deck boards are combustible. There is sometimes a misunderstanding regarding the combustibility of wood-plastic composite decking products. These products also are combustible; some manufacturers are now incorporating fire retardant chemicals into their products, and fire performance information for many decking products is now available online at the manufacturer's Web site. Wood decking that has been treated with an exterior fire retardant also is available.

Some checklists and guides suggest attaching a metal flashing strip, approximately 18 inches tall, between the top of the deck, patio or porch and the exterior (combustible) siding. The purpose of the flashing strip is to provide protection from ember exposure – both the embers themselves and the flaming exposure that could occur if accumulated debris at the point where the house or business intersects with the deck, patio or porch were ignited by the embers. This is a good idea, as long as the flashing is tucked in behind the siding where the top of flashing terminates so water cannot seep between the flashing and the siding.

### WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

Enclosing your elevated deck, patio or porch can help reduce the risk of damage from wildfire. These can be enclosed vertically by applying an exterior siding product around the edge of the deck, patio or porch or horizontally by applying an exterior panelized product to the bottom of the support joists.

To determine if enclosing your deck, patio or porch would be beneficial, consider whether you store combustible materials underneath it, or if your vegetation management plan is inadequate, particularly in the 0- to 30-foot zone. If you can avoid storing combustible materials underneath and if you create and maintain your vegetation management plan, enclosure will not significantly increase the protection of your house or business from wildfire.

If you choose to enclose your deck, patio or porch make sure you provide sufficient ventilation or other means for water to drain out. The building code requirement for a crawlspace is one square foot of venting for each 150 square



Use noncombustible materials when building a deck. Never store flammable materials on top of or beneath the deck.



feet of floor area. You should have at least this much ventilation and maybe more if you are in a particularly wet area. If you do not allow the structural support members and boards to dry out, fungal decay will become the biggest threat to your deck, patio or porch.

Enclosing your deck, patio or porch will not reduce the risk of the top being exposed to embers. For that, the best protection is to keep the surface clear of leaves, pine needles and other vegetative debris. If your house or business is supported by a column and beam system, and it doesn't have skirting around the perimeter, add a skirting of an ignition-resistant material. Remember to provide vents on all sides to ensure proper ventilation.

Learn more about how to choose wildfire-resistant decking materials at: [http://www.fire.ca.gov/fire\\_prevention/fire\\_prevention\\_wildland.php](http://www.fire.ca.gov/fire_prevention/fire_prevention_wildland.php).

## SIDING

### WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Siding can be vulnerable for two reasons. First, if ignited, combustible siding can provide a path for flames to reach other vulnerable components of your house or business such as windows and the eave area. Second, if fire penetrates the siding at a horizontal or vertical lap joint, it can move into the interior. Penetration at lap joints is more likely with combustible siding products, but depending on the severity of the exposure, can occur in noncombustible siding products.

Logs used in log houses or businesses will resist ignition better than the smaller members typically used for wood siding products. The most vulnerable aspect of a log wall is between log joints. This is particularly true in a chinked-style log structure. Wood siding with a more complicated lap joint (such as tongue-and-groove or shiplap) is better able to resist penetration into the stud cavity.

Vinyl siding will deform and fall off the wall at relatively low fire exposure. In these cases, protection of your house or business will depend on the performance of the underlying sheathing material.

Noncombustible siding, including fiber cement, traditional 'three-coat' stucco, and brick, will provide the best protection. Wood siding that has been treated with an exterior-rated fire retardant chemical also will improve the performance of siding against wildfire exposures.

### WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

If you have combustible siding, you should consider incorporating a noncombustible zone next to your house or business. In order to best resist fire penetration at lap joints, plain lap joints should be avoided, or exterior-type fire





retardant treated siding should be used. If you have a chinked-style log house or business, inspect the chinking for cracks and missing pieces. Repair and replace with fire-resistant chinking.

Replacing siding is expensive. There are other, less expensive items already discussed in this guide that will provide more protection for your house or business.

## FENCES

### WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Fences can be a wildfire hazard, particularly if they connect directly to the house or business. The bottom of fences collect debris that, when combined with combustible fencing materials, become a fuel source that can act as a wick to carry fire directly to the structure.

Some checklists recommend inserting a metal shield where the fence connects to the exterior (combustible) siding. How effective this is will depend on the size of the metal. Also, depending on how it is attached, over time it could result in other moisture-related problems with the siding. Find more effective solutions in the following section.

Solid noncombustible fencing (i.e., steel, stucco) that is more than six feet tall can serve as a barrier for the house or business from the radiant heat exposure from a passing fire front.

### WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

New fences should be entirely constructed of noncombustible or other ignition-resistant materials. A wood frame with steel mesh infill is another option that will provide adequate protection. Existing wood fences that are attached to the house or business should be retrofitted, so the fence ends with a noncombustible material, such as masonry or metal, or with a larger wood member (i.e., heavy timber) to keep fire from spreading. A common technique is to use a metal gate that is attached to the fence on one side and to the exterior siding on the other side.

It is important not to store firewood or other combustible materials against the fence, and to regularly remove debris and dead vegetation at the bottom of the fence.



Use metal gates and noncombustible materials when installing or replacing a fence.



## CHIMNEYS

### WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Spark arrestors for your chimney are required to prevent embers in your fireplace from starting wildfires. Think of it as a community-wide approach to wildfire protection – you protect your neighbors and they protect you by having a chimney spark arrestor.

### WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

Install a spark arrestor that has ½-inch mesh. These are available at large hardware stores or fireplace specialty stores.

## CREATING DEFENSIBLE SPACE

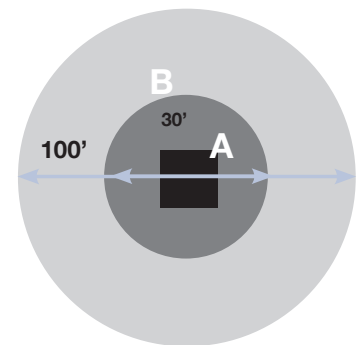
### IDENTIFYING FUEL MANAGEMENT ZONES

The first zone is the one closest to your house or business, which extends outward at least 30 feet or to the property line. This zone will require the most thinning and horizontal separation of trees and other vegetation, and removal of items that could cause a very intense fire close by. The objective of the thinning and separation is to reduce the chances that vegetation will provide a wildfire with a direct path to your house or business. Items that also should be removed include wood structures, boats, RVs, trailers and anything else containing combustible materials.

The next zone extends from 30 feet to approximately 100 feet or to the property line. If your house or business is located on a steeper slope (more than 20 percent) then this zone should be increased. [See the Topography Section for how to determine slope.] Trees and other vegetation here should be maintained and dead plant materials and tree branches should be removed. The objective of the work in this zone is to slow down and reduce the energy of the wildfire.

If you are in a forested area, there is a risk that a wildfire could spread to the tops of the trees. By making modifications in the 30- to 100-foot zone, such as increasing the separation between trees and vegetation and eliminating tree branches located close to the ground, you can help drive the wildfire back to the ground. These improvements also will help to reduce the chances that a fire will climb back up into the crown of the tree. Once created, it is critical to maintain these improvements.

Because of the importance of the area closest to your house or business, some experts suggest an additional zone that extends out 10 to 15 feet from the building itself. In high risk areas, such as those consisting of thick brush, extra attention is required throughout the entire 30-foot zone. Pay particular attention to the types of vegetation and mulch you select for this area, keeping in mind the required maintenance in warm climates. There are products on the market such as noncombustible mulches, including rock and gravel. However, if your home or business is in a coastal hurricane zone, avoid using rocks or gravel because these can become windborne debris and cause property



Defensible space involves two zones extending out from a home or business.



damage. Another option is to use noncombustible hardscape features, including brick and concrete walkways and surfacing that will reduce wildfire exposure. Choosing low-growing, irrigated herbaceous plant materials also is a good idea.

## THE AREA CLOSEST TO YOUR HOUSE OR BUSINESS (ZERO TO 30 FEET)

Take stock of what is in your yard or in the common areas around your place of business. Consider the plants and other items in the space that could increase the risk of your house or business catching on fire.

# PLANTS

## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Plants closest to a house or business can become a major fire hazard. Plants adjacent to combustible siding, as well as plants beneath or next to windows and those growing in the interior corners of a house or business present the greatest hazard. Embers from a wildfire can travel from a mile or more away, then land on houses or businesses and become trapped in corners, igniting nearby plants and exposing siding and the roof overhang to flames.

## WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

Remove dead vegetation closest to the house or business, paying attention to material on and underneath plants. Mulch can help keep the ground moist and reduce the need for watering, but it also can become a fire hazard. Avoid using wood, bark and rubber mulch products, particularly small pieces of bark. Consider rock mulch or other noncombustible materials. For plants, shorten the height, remove branches that are close to the ground, prune to reduce the amount of material on the plant and remove dead material.

# YARD AND GARDEN STRUCTURES

## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Pergolas, trellises, combustible fencing, playground equipment, gazebos and other structures located close to your house or business will increase its vulnerability to wildfire. Wind-blown embers can accumulate in or on such structures and ignite them. Depending on how close the items are to vegetation or a building, they might be ignited by direct contact

## BETTER VEGETATION CHOICES FOR YOUR AREA

Choose fire-resistant plants. Learn more about choosing plants, and community-based programs by visiting the links at [www.DisasterSafety.org/megafires](http://www.DisasterSafety.org/megafires) or at:

<http://www.interfacesouth.org/fire/>

[http://www.interfacesouth.org/products/fact\\_sheets/Preparing\\_Firewise\\_Plant\\_List.pdf](http://www.interfacesouth.org/products/fact_sheets/Preparing_Firewise_Plant_List.pdf)

<http://www.fema.gov/hazard/wildfire/index.shtm>

<http://www.itm-info.com/firewisehouse/images/landscape.pdf>

### Alabama

<http://216.226.177.78/WUI/Houseowner%20Wildland%20Fire%20Risk%20...nd%20Mitigation%20Publication.pdf>

### Mississippi

<http://msucares.com/pubs/publications/p2315.pdf>

<http://www.mfc.state.ms.us/pdf/Firewise/Are%20You%20Wise%20MS%20-%20Brochure.pdf>

### North Carolina

<http://www.ncfirewise.org/>

[http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/forestry/pdf/ag/firewise\\_landscaping.pdf](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/forestry/pdf/ag/firewise_landscaping.pdf)

### South Carolina

[http://www.sccfiresafe.org/LWF/LWF\\_06\\_17.pdf](http://www.sccfiresafe.org/LWF/LWF_06_17.pdf)

### Tennessee

[http://burnsafetn.org/firewise\\_communities.html](http://burnsafetn.org/firewise_communities.html)<http://www.tennessee.gov/agriculture/publications/firewise/firewise4.pdf>

<http://www.tennessee.gov/agriculture/publications/firewise/firewise6.pdf>



with flames. Trellises and pergolas are especially susceptible because they are often made of wood, are covered with vegetation, and are attached to or are adjacent to the structure.

### WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

Consider removing arbors or pergolas made from combustible materials. Structures made from metal and other noncombustible materials would be acceptable choices. Wood arbors and pergolas can be more resistant to fire by choosing exterior-rated, fire retardant lumber or larger dimension material. Select materials from the heartwood of a naturally durable species, such as cypress or cedar. Unfortunately, there is no treatment for lumber that functions as both a fire retardant and a preservative against wood-destroying organisms. Regarding the use of larger dimension material, remember that wood members with smaller cross-sections ignite and burn more easily. Consider mixing materials: the supporting structural members could be large timbers and the smaller members could be noncombustible. Do not forget to remove dead vegetation on these structures. Keep all yard structures free of accumulated debris. Any structures, such as a child's play set or gazebo built from combustible materials, should be relocated at least 30 feet away from the house or business.

## OUTBUILDINGS, FUEL TANKS AND FLAMMABLE PERSONAL PROPERTY

### WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

All buildings on the property face the same types of risks as the house or business when it comes to wildfire. Once ignited, these buildings will bring flames closer to the house or business and potentially result in ignition. If ignited, outbuildings will burn much longer than a typical plant, resulting in longer fire exposure for your house or business. They will also generate their own embers.

If fire comes too close to exterior liquefied petroleum (LP) tanks, a leak can develop at the pressure relief valve, resulting in a column of flame. Flame impingement on the upper surface of the tank can result in an explosion. It is



Wooden playground equipment can be a fire risk if located too close to a home or business.



Locate propane tanks at least 30 feet from a home or business and create defensible space around the tank.



important to follow local building code requirements regarding tank placement. It is also important to locate propane tanks at least 30 feet from your house or business and to create 10 to 15 feet of defensible space around the tank.

Boats and recreational vehicles (RVs) also are easily ignited during wildfires. If these are located near your house or business, they can help spread flames and generate radiant heat exposure.

### WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

Relocate combustibles outbuildings at least 30 feet away from your house or business. Other options are to create defensible space around the outbuilding, just as you did with your house or business, or to incorporate noncombustible or ignition-resistant materials into the building's construction.

If possible, store your boat or RV in a garage. Otherwise store it away from your house or business and/or move it when a wildfire threatens.

If necessary, relocate propane tanks so that they are at least 30 feet from your house or business. Create a noncombustible zone within 10 feet of the tank. Another option is to enclose the tank. Enclosures should be made of noncombustible materials (i.e., fiber cement siding, stucco or metal.)

## FIREWOOD, LEFTOVER BUILDING/CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS AND COMBUSTIBLE MULCH

### WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

It may seem obvious, but firewood, combustible mulch, or other flammable materials located too close to a house or business can be factors in spreading wildfire. Mulch offers several beneficial attributes to the soil, including weed and erosion control and water retention. Balancing the benefits of mulch with the potential risk from spreading fire to the house or business must be carefully considered.

The ease with which combustible mulches ignite and the rate at which fire will spread will depend on the characteristics of the particular mulch, but they will all burn. Smaller mulches or ones that have fine fuel components (for example, hairy bark or needle mulches) will ignite and spread fire more quickly. Studies have shown that composted mulches perform better than other combustible mulches, but this material exhibits smoldering combustion. Learn more by watching a mulch burning demonstration at [www.livingwithfire.info](http://www.livingwithfire.info).

What you should do: Move firewood, leftover building/construction materials, and items such as wheelbarrows containing combustible materials, as far away as possible from your house or business. Firewood piles should be located at least 30 feet from any building. Consider using noncombustible mulches in the areas immediately adjacent to any structures.



## ASSESSING AND MANAGING SURROUNDINGS BEYOND 30 FEET

### VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

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#### WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

If your house or business faces a wildland, and if you own, can get access or and permission to modify the vegetation in the area between 30 feet and 100 feet from your building, you should manage the vegetation to reduce the intensity of fire should one spark in this area. If it is a forested area, the goal is to contain it on the ground and prevent it from using ladder fuels to climb into tree tops.

#### WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

Regularly remove any dead brush from this extended fuel modification area and thin out trees. Remove branches close to the ground, so that a crown fire cannot be supported and a fire on the ground will not climb up into the tree canopy.

### IMPORTANCE OF TOPOGRAPHY

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#### WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

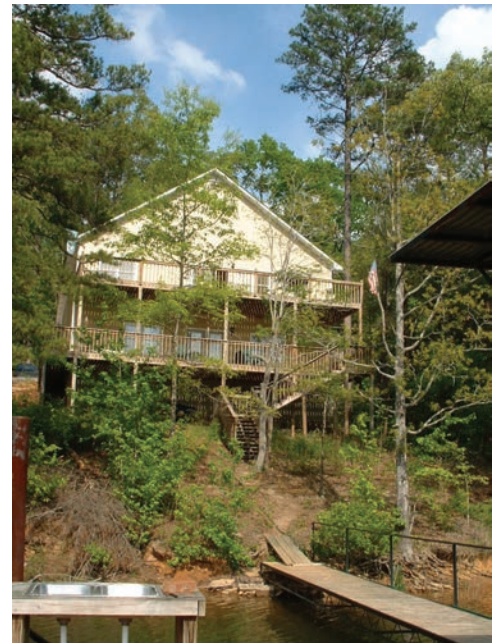
The topography around your house or business, which includes the slope of the land and the direction the structure faces, is a major consideration in assessing your risk exposure to wildfire. Wildfires burn up a slope faster and more intensely than along flat ground. A steeper slope will result in a faster moving fire with longer flame lengths.

#### WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

Determine the steepness of the slope. Select a mark on the slope and walk ten paces downhill, if your head is below the mark you have a steep slope.

If your house or business is mid-slope or at the top of a steep slope, but set back less than 15 feet for a single-story and 30 feet for a two-story building, take additional precautions. These include being more aggressive with your vegetation modification and maintenance plan. Also, be more aware of the materials used to build the house or business, deck or any outbuildings. You also will want to push the fuel modification area beyond the 100-foot length, if at all possible.

Consider increasing the protection of your house or business by constructing a noncombustible retaining wall to help increase the set-back. When making future improvements incorporate ignition-resistant features and materials into the house or business and surrounding landscape.





## IMPORTANCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

### WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Higher wind speeds are frequently associated with fast moving wildfires and some areas of the Southeast are prone to strong winds. Strong winds blowing a fire toward your house or business will have the same effect as being located on a slope; the fire will move faster, burn more intensely and have longer flame lengths.

### WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

If your house or business is located on the side of a development that faces into frequent prevailing winds or on a side that is parallel to the prevailing strong wind direction, consider pushing the fuel modification area beyond the 100-foot length if at all possible. A target for the extended fuel modification area would be between 150 feet and 200 feet.

## DEFENSIVE ACTIONS

### WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Some states have been given grants from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for the installation of exterior roof-mounted fire sprinklers. The use of exterior sprinklers is considered a defensive action and a primary use is to help limit the spread of the fire to the house or business. The sprinklers would be turned on prior to evacuation.

Using exterior sprinklers can help to reduce the chances of a house or business being damaged by a wildfire, but like all other actions that can be taken, it requires planning and the system must be maintained. It must also be treated as one component of a fire safe plan and it does not eliminate the need for other actions recommended in this guide.

### WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

If you are considering an external sprinkler system, check with your local fire department. They may have installation plans, and other suggestions. In order to maximize the effectiveness of exterior sprinklers, they should be operated by a stand-alone, independent water system (i.e., tank, pool, or lake) and must be attached to a pressurized delivery system or use a generator for needed pumps.

Separate water and power supplies will reduce the reliance on municipal power sources, which could be affected by the wildfire, and water sources that could be needed by firefighters to protect other properties.



## YOUR HOME OR BUSINESS

## REQUIRED ACTION OR RETROFIT

## RELATIVE COST

**ROOF COVERING** - Your roof, both in terms of its covering and design, is the most vulnerable part of your home or business when considering exposure to wildfire.

1. Do you have a non-combustible or Class "A" roof?	A professional roof inspection can help determine this. If not, replace your roof covering with a Class "A" fire-rated covering. Many styles are available.	\$\$\$\$
2. Do you have a tile or metal roof? If yes, are the gaps between covering and roof sheathing, which can occur at the edge and ridge, filled with either a bird stop or other material to seal the openings?  Are there other roof openings?	Install bird stops.  Plug any roof openings that are not functioning as vents.	\$-\$\$
3. Do you have combustible siding where a lower level roof meets and on the upper level roof or wall?	Replace siding with a more fire-resistant material.	\$\$-\$\$\$\$
4. Has vegetative debris accumulated on your roof?	Ember accumulation at the roof-wall intersection increases the risk of fire exposure, particularly if combustible siding is present. The problem is exacerbated with a buildup of debris. Routinely remove debris from the roof. Consider hiring a professional to help with this task.	FREE

**VENTS** are vulnerable to wind-blown embers and flames from nearby vegetation, combustible siding that has ignited or if combustible materials are stored nearby that could potentially catch on fire. Maintaining appropriate defensible space will help minimize wildfire risks.

1. Are your vents covered with 1/8-inch mesh metal screens?	There are many types of new vents on the market that are designed to reduce the risks of wind-blown embers getting inside. Consider installing new vents; availability and styles will vary by region. A less expensive alternative is to attach a minimum of 1/8-inch mesh metal screens over existing vents.	\$
2. If your vents are not covered with metal screens, have you attached 1/8-inch mesh metal screens and have you prepared vent covers that can be easily installed when a wildfire is approaching?	Attach screens and/or prepare covers. Attaching a solid cover would provide additional assurance that large embers would be kept out of the attic or crawlspace. Since the primary purpose is to prevent embers from getting inside your vents, 1/2-inch plywood could be used. Keep the areas around the vents clear of vegetation and other combustible materials. Install covers before evacuation and remove them upon your return. Use caution when installing and removing covers over vents on higher floors.	\$



## Notes

[illegible]

**SIDING** - Fire from ignited siding can spread into the stud cavity and up the wall into the eave and the soffit area. Vertical fire spread up the wall also can expose the windows to flames.

1. Is your siding made of a noncombustible material?	Re-siding is an expensive, and can be a worthwhile proposition, particularly if the surrounding defensible space is inadequate or if the building is 15 feet or closer to surrounding properties that, if ignited, could spread the flames.	\$\$\$\$
2. If you have a combustible siding product (e.g., wood siding), is it a panel or horizontal lap product?	<p>Panelized products have fewer lap joints, so can be considered less vulnerable. Wood siding shingles and plain bevel lap joints are the most vulnerable to flames.</p> <p>Since noncombustible siding won't ignite, vertical flame spread will not be a problem unless you have stored combustible materials or planted highly flammable vegetation next to the wall. Vertical flame spread also will be minimal when ignition-resistant material (e.g. exterior fire retardant-treated wood) is used. Siding products and assemblies that are better able to resist the penetration of flames into the stub cavity can be found at <a href="http://osfm.fire.ca.gov/strucfireengineer/pdf/bml/wuiproducs.pdf">http://osfm.fire.ca.gov/strucfireengineer/pdf/bml/wuiproducs.pdf</a></p>	
3. If you have a combustible horizontal lap siding product, does it have a simple lap joint, such as a plain bevel joint?		

## Notes

[illegible]



## YOUR SURROUNDINGS

### REQUIRED ACTION OR RETROFIT

## RELATIVE COST

**DEFENSIBLE SPACE** - This is the area within 100 feet of your home or business or to your property line and should be thought of in three sections: 0-5 feet, 0-30 feet and 30-100 feet. The purpose of defensible space is to modify the landscape through pruning and maintaining it to keep a wildfire from getting too close to the structure.

0 to 5 feet	<p>Plants adjacent to combustible siding, as well as plants under or next to windows or interior corners present the greatest hazard. Embers may still be able to ignite individual islands of plants, so plant selection and maintenance is most critical in this zone.</p> <p>Avoid plants with the following characteristics:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Generate ground litter from bark, leaves, or seeds that slough off</li> <li>2. Have (very low moisture content) dead material within the plant</li> <li>3. Have small branches and needles that can easily ignite</li> <li>4. Have a high resin or volatiles content</li> </ol>	
0 to 30 feet	In this zone, the goal is to prevent any surface fire from burning up the building. Prune lower branches in trees and remove nearby shrubs (ladder fuels) to prevent the fire from moving back into the tree crown, Separate groups of non-tree vegetation to make it more difficult for fire to move horizontally.	FREE - \$
Do you have vegetation that is close to, adjacent to or under vents, soffits or windows?	Carefully maintain or remove. All vegetation needs to be maintained, but ground cover or small plants will be less of a problem here. Larger plants, particularly those that tend to generate an abundance of dead material will pose a significant threat to your home or business.	FREE

## Notes

[illegible]









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