



WILDFIRES

Please note that the foundation messages are included in the previous section: *Key messages for all-hazards household and family disaster planning*. Separate messages are also available for other specific hazards.

Like all fires, a wildfire (also known as a forest fire, brushfire or bushfire) requires three ingredients: oxygen, heat and fuel. A wildfire is large, uncontrolled and potentially destructive and spreads quickly and may change direction or jump across gaps. Wildfires can affect rural and urban areas, and can start in just seconds, sparked by a range of natural causes (for example, lightning) or human carelessness (such as a discarded cigarette). The spread of wildfires depends on the topography, the fuel available and the weather. Dry vegetation and abundant or dead wood that has not been cleared are all sources of fuel. A small fire can become a rapidly spreading inferno in a matter of minutes – particularly if it is windy.

Although they can have some ecologically beneficial effects on forest and wilderness areas, wildfires can cause extensive damage. These can lead to death, injury and property damage, loss of shelter and livelihood, disruption of lifeline infrastructure and destruction of community. They may also result in adverse environmental consequences, such as loss of wild habitat, threat to biodiversity, land degradation and increased risk of erosion. Meanwhile, the chemicals used to fight the fires can pollute natural water sources..



Assess and plan

Key messages	Context-specific details
<p>Regularly inspect your home and property for fire hazards</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspect for local hazards, such as exposed firewood, leaf and brush clutter and dead and overhanging branches. • Check rain gutters to clear out flammable debris. • Check irrigation systems to ensure access to water. • Check for spaces between roof tiles or within the structure where burning embers could become lodged. • Check that flammable substances (including fertilizers and pesticides) are safely stored. • Check that all fire exits and property exit routes are clear.
<p>Report hazardous conditions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediately report any hazardous conditions that could cause a wildfire to local fire fighters.
<p>Make your property for fire teams to easily find and access</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make clearly marked driveways and turnaround space accessible to fire engines. Access roads should measure 3.5 meters or be 12 feet wide with vertical clearance of 4.5 meters, i.e. 15 feet.



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Mitigate risks: physical or environmental

Key messages	Context-specific details
Prevent wildfires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never discard cigarette butts on the ground. • Never leave an outside fire unattended. • Always ensure that campfires are completely extinguished after use. • Clear outdoor areas of broken glass since this can reflect sunlight and start a fire. • Dispose of glass bottles in closed recycling bins.
Select a safe location for your building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on levelled ground. Fire spreads more rapidly even on minor slopes. • Set single-storey structures at least 10 meters, i.e. 30 feet from any ridge or cliff. For taller buildings, increase the distance. • Ensure that there is enough distance between buildings, following local or international standards (refer to Sphere standards for emergency shelter).
Design, build and maintain your structures with wildfires in mind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plant low-flammability landscaping to reduce fuel for a wildfire. • Design and construct buildings to limit their flammability. • Use fire-resistant or non-combustible building materials whenever possible. • For roofing, use terracotta, clay, metal, slate, cement, or asphalt (Class A), tiles. • For exterior walls, use stucco or masonry rather than vinyl or wood. • Treat wood or combustible materials with fire retardant. • Use only thick, tempered safety glass in large windows and sliding glass doors. • Install electrical lines underground if possible. • Install and maintain a lightning rod. • Install spark arrestors in chimneys to prevent large particles from escaping and starting a fire. • Provide at least two ground-level doors, for easy and safe exit, and two means of escape from each room (doors or windows).

Clear flammable materials away from your property	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly clean roofs and gutters, removing twigs, dead leaves, needles and other debris. • Remove all dead wood and dense vegetation within at least 7 meters, i.e. 30 feet around your home. • Prune trees and shrubs so that the lowest limbs are 2–3m (6–10ft) from the ground. • Dispose of cuttings and debris. • Avoid using wooden lawn furniture.
Maintain water sources for fire fighting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain an irrigation system. • Identify and maintain outside water sources such as ponds, cisterns, wells, swimming pools and hydrants. • Keep hoses long enough to reach any part of any buildings. • Create a separate pump hydrant or use swimming-pool circulation pumps for dowsing properties. • Install freeze-proof exterior water outlets on two sides of the home and additional outlets 15 meters or 50 feet from home for fire fighters to use.
Take precautions with flammable materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid open burning, especially during fire season. • Site aboveground propane tanks at least 9 meters or 30 feet from buildings. • Dispose of ashes in a metal bucket, saturate them in water for two days, and then bury them in mineral soil.



Prepare to respond: develop skills and store provisions

Key messages	Context-specific details
Plan and practise two ways out of your neighbourhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan a secondary way out in case your primary escape route is blocked.
Monitor conditions, stay informed, listen to the radio and follow instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to local radio and watch television regularly for updated information and instructions. • Stay in touch with neighbours if possible.

Respond to early warnings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay alert for emergency warnings and respond to them immediately. • Know the alarm system that will be used, and practise your response. • If you are advised to evacuate, leave immediately. • Take your pets or service animals with you. • Call your out-of-area contact to notify them about where you will be going.
Leave if you think you should, or if authorities tell you to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you are advised to evacuate, or if you think you are in danger, evacuate immediately. The fire may spread too fast for officials to issue evacuation orders. • If you are not trained and equipped to fight a wildfire, do not put your life at risk. • Leave right away: delay could be deadly. • Make sure all fire tools are outside and easy to access.
Protect your animals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you have livestock or horses, sweep hay and other combustible feed away from the barn or stable. • Close windows and doors to prevent embers from entering buildings. • Consider opening barn doors and corrals to let animals escape.
Confine pets and service animals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confine pets and service animals to one room. • If you are evacuating with animals, leave early.
Keep your vehicle fuel tank full and ready to go	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face your vehicle in the direction of escape. • Shut your car doors and close the windows. • Have your key ready, or leave it in the ignition.
Wear protective clothing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear sturdy shoes, long cotton or woollen trousers/pants, long-sleeved shirts and gloves. • Carry a damp handkerchief to protect your face. • Carry wet towels to cover your head or bare skin or to wrap your feet, in case you need to run through small area of fire.
Prepare your home for a fire, if you have time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shut off the gas at the meter. • Close the valves on propane tanks. • Open fireplace dampers. • Close windows, vents, doors, blinds and non-combustible window coverings. Use wet cloth to block any other openings. • Remove lightweight or combustible window coverings. • Move combustible furniture to the centre of the home, away from windows and doors. • Place in a pool or pond any valuables that will not be damaged by water. • Remove combustible items from around the home. • Connect hoses to outside taps. • Gather your fire tools.
If your area has a <i>stay or go</i> policy, and if you are trained, you may decide to stay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you plan to stay, make sure that you keep and know how to use fire suppression tools, including a rake, an axe, a handsaw or chainsaw, a bucket, a shovel, a ladder and sand buckets. • You may have to fight small fires before professional help arrives. • Remember that normal water pressure may not be available.

If you are trapped by fire, crouch in a pond, river or pool	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If there is no body of water nearby, look for shelter in a cleared area among a bed of rocks. Lie flat, face down and cover your body with soil. Breathe air close to the ground.• You cannot outrun a fire.
After a wildfire, be aware of hazards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Look out for smouldering hot spots or items, and be alert to the possibility of re-ignition.• Beware of hazards such as burnt trees and power poles or fallen wires and ash pits.• Seek permission before re-entering the area.• Check for damage and stay out of damaged buildings.
After a wildfire, take precautions while cleaning your property	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Minimize health risks from hazardous materials such as toxic fumes from substances in garden sheds or garages, burnt asbestos and fine dust particles. Hold a damp cloth over your face to minimize and filter airborne particles.• Keep children away from clean-up sites.• Minimize the health risks from breathing dust particles by wetting any debris, and using a two-strap dust particulate mask, coveralls, leather gloves, and heavy-soled shoes during clean-up.• Use rubber gloves when cleaning.• Check for assistance when cleaning up and disposing of hazardous materials.