

FIRE ADAPTED COMMUNITIES

of Kittitas County



PREPARE FOR WILDFIRE • PREPARE FOR WILDFIRE • PREPARE FOR WILDFIRE • PREPARE FOR WILDFIRE



WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE FIRE ADAPTED?

A fire adapted community accepts fire as part of the natural landscape. The community understands its fire risk, and takes action **before** a wildfire to minimize harm to residents, homes, businesses, parks, utilities, and other community assets. These collective actions empower all residents to be safer in their environment. To help prepare your community, consider **your role** in making it fire adapted.

Start WITH YOUR HOME

WHERE DOING "LITTLE" THINGS CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE

Many people see the large flame fronts on the news and figure that's what burned the homes. However, most homes are not destroyed by these huge walls of flames, but by the little embers. Wildfire embers can travel over a mile and you can control what happens when they land by employing a few safety measures.

- Use fire resistant door mats – no sisal or flammable natural fibers.
- Don't store extra wood material under or near the home.
- Don't store firewood on your deck during wildfire season. Try to use it all up in the winter, or move it in the spring.
- Keep your roof free of debris.
- Screen vent openings with an 1/8 inch screen or smaller.
- Replace fiberglass window screens with metal. Not only do they keep embers from burning through, they add another line of heat protection to your home.
- Ensure you have the highly visible reflective address signs. If you don't have one, contact the Kittitas County Public Works Office at 509.962.7523.
- Ensure your driveway is large enough for a fire truck to turn around. If there is a question, contact Fire District #7 (for the Hidden Valley/Swauk area) and they'd be happy to come out and give you suggestions.
- Be careful when mowing during wildfire season. Generally, mowing a lawn is fine, but when mowing a pasture there is a much greater possibility of hitting a rock and throwing a spark.
- Your Fire District participates in the Ready Set Go! Program. Contact them for more details on how to be prepared.
- Remove vegetation from around propane tanks.



Lawn mowers, weedeaters, chain saws, tractors, and trimmers can all spark a wildfire.

INDUSTRIAL FIRE PROTECTION LEVELS

By law, the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) uses two closure systems to reduce wildfire risk on 12.7 million acres of private and state forestland protected by the agency.

- **Level I** Fire equipment and fire watch service is required.
- **Level II** Limits certain activities to between 8 p.m. and 1 p.m.
- **Level III** Prohibits some activities and limits others to between 8 p.m. and 1 p.m.
- **Level IV** All operations are prohibited.

Summer Fire Rules:

From April 15 to October 15, or later if the fire danger warrants it, the following restrictions are activated:

- Cigarette smoking on forestland is only allowed on roads, cleared landings, gravel pits, or similar cleared areas.
- Fireworks may not be lit on forestland.
- Chainsaw use in nonindustrial work must follow IFPL requirements.

Call 800.323.BURN to check the IFPL for your area. When prompted for your zone – put in 675. This is the zone of the Hidden Valley/Swauk Fire Adapted Community.

FOR MORE INFO

**Kittitas County Conservation District
Kittitas County Fire & Rescue District #7
Firewise Communities
National Fire Protection Association**



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www.firewise.org • 1.617.984.7486
www.nfpa.org • 1.800.344.3555

Frequently Asked Questions ABOUT DEFENSIBLE SPACE

WHAT IS DEFENSIBLE SPACE?

Defensible space is an area around your home or structures, which is either man-made or natural where the vegetation is modified and maintained to slow the rate and intensity of an advancing wildland fire. It also provides room for firefighters to work and helps protect the forest from becoming involved should a structure fire occur. It is frequently divided into zones. These zones are described in more detail on page 4.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VEGETATION AND WILDFIRE THREAT?

Many people do not view the plants growing on their property as a threat. But in terms of wildfire, the vegetation adjacent to their homes can have considerable influence upon the survivability of their houses. All vegetation, including plants native to the area, as well as ornamental plants, is potential wildfire fuel. If vegetation is properly modified and maintained, a wildfire can be slowed, the length of flames shortened, and the amount of heat reduced – all of which assist firefighters to defend the home against an oncoming wildfire.

THE FIRE DEPARTMENT IS SUPPOSED TO PROTECT MY HOUSE, SO WHY BOTHER WITH DEFENSIBLE SPACE?

Some individuals incorrectly assume that a fire engine will be parked in their driveway and firefighters will be actively defending their homes if a wildfire approaches. During a major wildfire, it is unlikely there will be enough firefighting resources available to defend every home. In these instances, firefighters will likely select homes they can most safely and effectively protect. This has been very apparent during our County's recent wildfires. It is important to remember many of our own firefighters might be mobilized on other fires outside our county. The key is to reduce fire intensity as wildfire nears the house. This can be accomplished by reducing the amount of flammable vegetation surrounding a home. **Consequently, the most important person in protecting a house from wildfire is not a firefighter, but the property owner.** And it's the action taken by the owner before the wildfire occurs (such as proper landscaping) that is critical.

As the number of people living in and adjacent to the wildland urban interface grows, the likelihood of homes being threatened by wildfire also grows.



DOES DEFENSIBLE SPACE REQUIRE A LOT OF BARE GROUND IN MY LANDSCAPE?

No. Unfortunately, many people have a misconception. While bare ground is certainly effective in reducing the wildfire threat, it is unnecessary due to appearance, soil erosion, and aesthetics. Many homes have attractive, well-vegetated landscapes that also serve as effective defensible space.

DOES CREATING A DEFENSIBLE SPACE REQUIRE SPECIAL SKILLS / EQUIPMENT?

No. For the most part, creating a defensible space employs routine gardening and landscape maintenance practices such as pruning, mowing, weeding, plant removal, appropriate plant selection, and irrigation. Equipment needed includes common tools like a chain saw, pruning saw, pruning shears, loppers, weed-eater, shovel, and a rake.

There are many resources in the county that can provide technical assistance. The WSU extension office, Master Gardeners, and even local nurseries should be able

to give tips on fire resistant plants. There is also a great reference guide "Fire-resistant Plant for Home Landscape" that can be picked up at KCCD or viewed online at: http://www.firefree.org/images/uploads/FIR_FireResPlants_07.pdf

DOES HAVING A DEFENSIBLE SPACE GUARANTEE MY HOUSE WILL SURVIVE A WILDFIRE?

No. Under extreme conditions, almost any house can burn. Having a defensible space will significantly improve the odds of your home surviving a wildfire.

Examples **THE GOOD, BAD AND UGLY**

DO'S & DON'TS OF DEFENSIBLE SPACE



GOOD

Photo Above:

Using cement products for the steps to the deck takes away the wicking action. Wooden steps can become a wick to the rest of the house, and then a wooden deck can become kindling. Replace with fire resistant materials if possible.



GOOD

Photo Above:

Consider screening in your deck to keep embers from accumulating and causing the deck to become kindling for the house. Think of embers as snow – wherever a snowflake can go, an ember can too.

BAD

Photo Below:

This is the same home pictured on the far left after the Taylor Bridge fire. The steps acted as a wick, starting the deck on fire which eventually led to the siding on the house. Luckily it was a fire resistant siding, so it burned very slowly and the firefighters were able to cut the burning materials out.



ZONES OF DEFENSIBLE SPACE

The zones of defensible space can vary depending on topography, but as a guide, it is generally divided into three zones. Zone 1 is the first 30 feet from your home. Firewise experts often add a 5 foot fire free element in this zone. Try to keep the first 5 feet near your home free of combustibles, then work out to 30 feet, paying extra attention to limbing and spacing trees, removing ladder fuels and other flammable items. Then extend out to 100 feet from the home. Trees can be closer, but ladder fuels should still be removed from under the canopies and fuel breaks are encouraged. The remaining zone is often measured at 200 feet, but can be considered the remainder of your property.

Call the Kittitas County Conservation District or Fire District #7 for a more complete assessment of your home.

Many of these concepts include thinning and removing brush for forest health as well as defensible space.

GOOD

Photo Right:

Landowners can install additional water sources for firefighters. Most Forest Service and DNR personnel would appreciate a minimum of 2,000 gallons, but this landowner installed more than one source. Be sure to label them well so that firefighters know what and where they are.



BAD

Photo Middle Right:

Examples of highly flammable plants include ornamental juniper, Leyland cypress, Italian cypress, and arborvitae. It is suggested that these highly flammable plants not be used in landscaping, but if you must, make sure they are not in the first 30 feet near the home.

UGLY

Photo Below:

A home on Highway 10 that almost burned due to an ember landing in an arborvitae. Luckily a helicopter with a bucket was overhead at the time and saved the home.



GOOD

Photo Right:

Organize a Firewise workshop or incorporate defensible space information into a Wildfire Preparedness Day. There are numerous entities who would participate – including the Red Cross, WA Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network, Puget Sound Energy, WA Dept. of Natural Resources, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Fire Districts and the County Fire Marshal to name a few. Fire District #7 and KCCD would be happy to help you organize an event.



Planning and Preparation

THINK **LEAN, CLEAN AND GREEN**

A HANDY CHECKLIST

Part of the process of defensible space planning is creating a new consciousness about vegetation management and how the decisions you make now will influence your overall defensible space planning. The following "Lean, Clean and Green" checklist should be revisited periodically as part of your overall vegetation management plan.



✓ Emphasize use of hardscaping such as rock (gravels and decorative) and non-combustible hard surfaces (concrete sidewalks, brick patios and asphalt driveways). Placing gravel around the first 10 feet of your home is a much better alternative than bark and requires less maintenance.



✓ Emphasize the use of low growing herbaceous (non-woody) plants that are kept green during the fire season through irrigation if necessary. Herbaceous plants include maintained grass, a variety of groundcovers, bedding plants, bulbs, and perennial flowers.



✓ Tree limbs within 15 feet of a chimney, encroaching on powerlines or touching the house should be removed.

✓ Fuel reduction efforts are ongoing in Kittitas County. If you have an HOA, check on your community rules first. Then contact the Kittitas County Conservation District or the Department of Natural Resources to receive a free assessment and see if you qualify for a Cost-share program. Many programs are available that provide assistance to thin and limb trees and remove brush.



✓ Deciduous (plants that shed their foliage) trees and shrubs are acceptable if they are kept green and free of dead plant material, ladder fuels are removed and individual plants or groups of plants are arranged so that adjacent wildland vegetation cannot convey a fire through them to the structure. When it comes to shrubs, the shorter the better.

✓ Don't use ornamental coniferous shrubs and trees (such as juniper, arborvitae, and mugo pine) and tall exotic grasses (such as pampas grass).

✓ Where you do retain coniferous shrubs and trees, make sure they are healthy and free of dead wood, pruned to reduce the amount of fuel and height; and ladder fuels are removed.

Forest Health

INSECTS AND DISEASE

Being a Fire Adapted Community in a forested area also requires landowners to become familiar with forest health issues such as insects and disease. Some of the more common issues in Upper Kittitas County are listed below.



SPRUCE BUDWORM

Many people noticed defoliated branch tips and tree tops and have attributed this to lack of water. Actually, it is the work of Western Spruce Budworm. These insects prefer hosts trees of Douglas-fir and grand fir. As the days lengthen, budworm larvae emerge from their shelters and crawl toward the tops and branch tips of trees to eat new growth. They may release a silken thread and disperse, carried by the wind, through the forest. In July and August the adult western spruce budworm moths fly, mate and lay their eggs. Budworm moths are small and triangular. Their color varies from light gray to orange-rust. Sometimes large numbers of flying moths and accumulations of dead or resting moths can be observed. In the long term, forest management that enhances the proportion of healthy pine and larch, reduces canopy layers, and increases the vigor of fir host trees will shift the balance away from budworm habitat.

WESTERN PINE BEETLE

The western pine beetle attacks and kills mature ponderosa pine throughout much of its range. Most of the time, the populations of these native insects are at low levels, and the beetles attack stressed, damaged, or weakened ponderosa pines. Western pine beetle populations often increase dramatically during periods of drought, and over-stocked stands are also subject to western pine beetle attack. Trees damaged mechanically or by lightning or fire are often targets of attack, as are diseased host trees. Thinning overstocked stands not only increase health, but also reduces the intensity of wildfires.



DWARF MISTLETOE

Douglas-fir dwarf mistletoe has 1/4- to 1/2-inch olive green shoots, while ponderosa pine dwarf mistletoe has 3- to 8-inch olive green to yellow shoots. Seeds are sticky and are forcibly shot from shoots growing on swellings. These seeds may travel up to 100 feet depending on the species and wind. When they land on the proper host, they sprout in the spring and penetrate the thin bark, forming a new infection. The dead limbs and brooms resulting from this disease adds to wildfire fuels.

WHEN WILDFIRE COMES *Emergency* A PLAN FOR **YOU AND YOUR PETS**

BE PREPARED

- Monitor** fire weather conditions and fire status. Stay tuned to your TV or local radio stations for updates, or check the fire department website. The Kittitas County Public Safety live audio feed is available to listen to on phone apps such as 5-0 Radio and on your computer at Broadcastify.com.
- Evacuate** as soon as possible.
- Alert** family and neighbors.
- Dress** in appropriate clothing (i.e. clothing made from natural fibers, such as cotton, and work boots). Goggles, a dry bandana or particle mask are handy.
- Ensure** that you have your emergency supply kit on hand that includes all necessary items, such as a battery powered radio, cell phone charger, spare batteries, emergency contact numbers, and ample drinking water.
- Remain** close to your house, drink plenty of water and keep an eye on your family and pets until you are ready to leave.

INSIDE CHECKLIST, IF TIME ALLOWS

- Close all windows and doors, leaving them unlocked.
- Remove flammable window shades and curtains and close metal shutters.
- Move furniture to the center of the room, away from windows and doors.
- Turn off pilot lights and air conditioning.
- Leave your lights on so firefighters can see your house and other structures under smoky conditions.



WHEN TO LEAVE

Do not wait to be advised to leave if there is a possible threat to your home or evacuation route. Leave early enough to avoid being caught in fire, smoke or road congestion. If you are advised to leave by local authorities, do not hesitate!



Preparing for your pet makes sense.

Your pet is an important member of your household and survival in an emergency can largely depend on planning done today.

OUTSIDE CHECKLIST, IF TIME ALLOWS

- Bring combustible items from the exterior of the house inside or move away from the home (e.g. patio furniture, children's toys, door mats, etc). If you have a pool, place them inside.
- Turn off propane tanks and other gas at the meter.
- Leave exterior lights on.
- Back your car into the driveway to facilitate a quick departure. Shut doors and roll up windows.
- Have a ladder available.
- Cover attic and ground vents with pre-cut plywood or commercial covers if time permits.

PLAN FOR YOUR PETS & LIVESTOCK

- Prepare** a pet emergency supply kit. Keep at least three days of food and water in airtight containers. Pack an extra supply of medicine and a first aid kit. Include pet's registration information, medical records, and vaccination documents. If appropriate, include a pet litter box.
- Be sure** your pet is wearing a collar with an ID Tag and have leashes ready to use.
- Transport** your pet in its crate or pet carrier. Have a trailer set up for evacuation of horses and other livestock, along with hay and grain.
- Create** a buddy system. Plan with neighbors, friends, or relatives to make sure someone is available to care for or evacuate your pets if you are unable to do so.