

Is Your Home Firewise?

Adapted from the Firewise Communities Program

As Westsiders here in Washington, it's difficult to imagine the threat of a wildfire as we tromp through the rain and mud for close to eight months of the year. But due to our beautiful dry summers, the landscape can dry out quickly, presenting a window of time where a grass or forest fire can pose a serious threat to property and lives.

Wildfires don't have to destroy everything in their path. Science and research have proven that using Firewise principles on your property can minimize damage and prevent losses. The work you do today can make a difference and most of the work you do to protect your home are simple maintenance tasks that help keep your property attractive and in good shape. Follow these simple steps now and throughout the year to prepare and help reduce the risk of your home and property becoming fuel for a wildfire.

STEP 1: HOME IGNITION ZONE

Keep leaves and needles off your roof and deck. Create a fuel free area within 3-5 feet of your home's perimeter. From 5 feet to a minimum of 30 feet out, thin and space vegetation, remove dead leaves and needles, prune shrubs and tree limbs. Keep areas around decks, sheds, fences and swing sets clear of debris and vegetation. Keep firewood stacks off decks and away from your home and other structures.

STEP 2: LANDSCAPING AND FIREWISE PLANTS

To prevent fire spread, trim back branches that overhang structures and prune branches of large trees 6 to 10 feet from the ground. Remove plants containing resins, oils, and waxes; make sure organic mulch is at least 5 feet from structures. Choose Firewise plants by consulting the District or www.firewise.org.

STEP 3: DISASTER PLAN

Develop, discuss and practice an emergency action plan with everyone in your home. Include details for pets, large animals, and livestock. Program cell phones with emergency numbers. Know two ways out of your neighborhood and have a predesignated meeting place. During wildfire season, have tools such as a shovel, rake, axe, handsaw, or chainsaw available, and test and maintain an emergency water source. Always leave if you feel unsafe – don't wait to be notified.

STEP 4: EMERGENCY RESPONDER ACCESS

Identify your home and neighborhood with legible, clearly marked street names and numbers. Make your driveway at least 12 feet wide with a vertical clearance of 15 feet and a slope of less than 5 percent to provide access to emergency vehicles.

STEP 5: FIRE-RESISTANT CONSTRUCTION

Any attachments to your home such as decks, porches, and fences should be fire-resistant. If not, your entire home is vulnerable to ignition. Embers can collect in small nooks and crannies and ignite combustible materials; radiant heat from flames can crack windows.

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To learn more about Firewise contact Kristin Marshall at 425-377-7017 or visit www.firewise.org.

