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FireSmart tips for protecting your home from wildfire

They move fast and can be caused by weather or by people – and there are cost-effective ways to prevent them. Is your home at risk from wildfire? Learn about – and reduce – the risks through FireSmart standards.

Although wildfire is a natural phenomenon (approximately 57 per cent of wildfires in B.C. are caused by lightning strikes), roughly 42 per cent of all wildfires are caused by human activity.

“Wildfires often start as small, accidental ignitions, and if you live in or near a forested region of British Columbia, you should expect to have to contend with the spread of wildfire sooner or later,” says fire chief Thomas Doherty.

“First, people should never underestimate the speed at which fire can move. Wildland forest fires are capable of spreading at an astonishing rate,” he adds.

Crowning forest fires often spread up to 5.5 kilometers per hour, with spotting as far as two kilometres ahead. Windblown grass fires can spread at speeds up to 8.5 kilometres per hour.

Preventive measures and fuel management offer the best protection.

“Some preventive measures cost relatively little and reduce wildfire danger by a great deal,” Doherty emphasizes. *“We encourage everyone to apply FireSmart standards to prevent, protect or reduce wildfire damage to their property.”*

Before planning or initiating fuel management activities around buildings or facilities, establish three concentric priority zones around each building. Unique vegetation management activities are recommended for each priority zone.

“Mature trees, shrubs, grass, even your wood pile, are all potential fuels and can easily ignite – and increase the chance of buildings catching or being destroyed by fire. Managing the space around your house and buildings is of prime importance,” Doherty says. (See backgrounder for additional details on actions to take in each priority zone.)

Building materials and design standards also help reduce fire damage.

“People might not be able to apply all of these to existing buildings, but many FireSmart modifications are relatively easily accomplished,” Doherty says. *“Others can be included in long-term maintenance or renovation plans or incorporated into new building design and construction.”*

Roof The most fire resistant roofing materials are metal, clay tile and asphalt shingles. Untreated wooden shakes and shingles are ideal fuels for a roaring wildfire. Keep roof areas free of combustible debris and ensure that no overhanging trees or vegetation provide fuel for airborne sparks and embers.

Exterior walls Materials such as stucco, metal, brick, cement board and concrete offer superior fire resistance to wildfire. Logs and heavy timbers are a little less effective, while wood and vinyl siding offer very little protection.

Eaves and vents Ready-made openings on attics and crawl spaces can allow heat and embers to enter a building and ignite it. Ensure eaves are closed in and screen all vents including soffits. Keep areas under decks and porches clear of debris and sheath in the underside of balconies and decks with flame resistant materials.

Doors and windows Clear fuel concentrations within 10 metres of windows and glass doors. Greater protection is provided by smaller double or thermal pane or tempered glass windows. Single pane glass provides virtually no protection.

Find more information on FireSmart and protecting homes and communities from wildfire at

- <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/wildfire-status/prevention/for-your-home-community>
- <https://www.firesmartcanada.ca/>
- www.campbellriver.ca/fire (under Fire Smart Program)

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BACKGROUND

Priority Zone 1

Immediately adjacent to buildings and extending 10 metres across flat terrain in all directions, the main objective is to create an environment that will not support fire of any kind. In some situations, this may be the only zone or area that homeowners need to manage.

Priority Zone 2

From 10 to 30 metres away from buildings, the main objective is to create an environment that will only support fires of lower intensity and rate of spread. Reduce fuels by thinning and pruning. Remove (highly combustible and dead) trees and debris, space trees so that the crowns of individual trees are three to six metres apart. Coniferous trees such as pine, spruce and fir are more combustible than deciduous trees. When replanting an area, consider low flammability trees such as aspen, poplar and birch.

Priority Zone 3

From 30 to 100 metres away from buildings, thin and property space trees (three to six metres between crowns). Also thin and reduce under story vegetation. Fuel management in this area may only be needed when high hazards exist due to continuous heavy forest vegetation and steep topography that are not reduced through fuel management in Priority Zone 2.