

Defending Your Home from Fire

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Spring Lake Park-Blaine-Mounds View Fire Department

Are there hidden dangers lurking in close forests or brush-covered open spaces near you? Does your yard have large areas of dry grass or foliage? Are there trees touching or overhanging your home's roof? Michael Brown, Under Secretary of Homeland Security for Emergency Preparedness and Response says, "Knowing the risks and preparing now by taking the appropriate measures to protect your family and property can reduce damage and save lives".

The DNR and the Spring Lake Park Blaine-Mounds View Fire Department is offering some tips to fireproof your home:

No Cost Actions

- Know your area. Stay informed about wildfire preparedness. Know how to access emergency information specific to your community and take steps to reduce damage a wildfire could cause.
- Move your firewood pile out of your home's defensible space.
- Clean your roof and gutters of leaves and pine needles (best done in October).
- Clear the view of your house number so it can be easily seen from the street.
- Put a hose (at least 100' long) on a rack and attach it to an outside faucet.
- Trim all tree branches if they overhang your house.
- Trim all tree branches from within 20' of all chimneys.
- Remove trees along the driveway to make it 12' wide.
- Prune branches overhanging the driveway to have 14' overhead clearance.
- Maintain a green lawn for 30' around your home.
- Plan and discuss an escape plan with your family. Have a practice drill. Include your pets. Have one family meeting place that you all agree upon.
- Check your fire extinguishers. Are they still charged? Are they easy to get to in an emergency? Do you know where they are and how to use them?
- Clear deadwood and dense flammable vegetation from your home's defensible space.
- Remove conifer shrubs from your home's defensible space especially if your home is in a high-risk area.
- Talk to you children about not starting fires or playing with matches. Remind them that matches and lighters are adult tools, not children's toys.
- If you have a burn barrel that you use for burning trash, STOP! Compost leaves in the fall, don't burn them.
- Always have a shovel on hand and hook up the garden hose BEFORE you start the fire.
- Never burn if the smoke and flames are blowing towards your home (or your neighbor's home).
- Know swimming pools and patios can be a safety zone.

- Never leave a fire, even a cigarette, burning unattended.
- Understand stone walls act as heat shields and deflect flames.

Low Cost Actions

- Install big, highly visible house numbers (at least 4" tall) at the entrance of the driveway onto the street. Use non-flammable materials and posts.
- Hold a neighborhood meeting to talk about fire safety. Invite your local fire prevention firefighters. Have coffee and donuts for neighbors.
- Install a fire extinguisher in the kitchen AND the garage.
- Install a metal shields between your home's attic, eaves and an attached wood fence.
- Replace conifer and evergreen shrubs with low-flammable plants in your home's defensible space.
- Thin and prune conifer trees for 30' to 100' around your home.
- Purchase and use a NOAA weather alert radio. Many types of emergencies are announced through this service.
- Replace vinyl gutters and downspouts with non-flammable, metal gutters and downspouts.
- Install a spark arrestor or heavy wire screen with opening less than 1/2" on wood burning fireplaces and chimneys.

Landscape Smarts

The amount of cleared space around a home is directly related to a home's ability to survive wildfire. Removal of grasses, brush, trees and other common fuels improves the odds that the structure will survive.

State and Federal official offer the following guidance:

- **Grasses-** Mow grasses low in areas close to the house, garage, outbuildings, decks and trees with low-growing branches. You can gradually increase the height of grass that grows farther from these places, but it should be no higher than eight inches.
- **Wildflowers-** Tall, dense patches of wildflowers can be powerful fuel for fires, particularly when the flowers are in the dormant stage. Plant wildflowers in widely separated beds. The beds should be separated by gravel walkways, rock retaining walls or low grass areas. Do not place flowers near structures, unless beds are frequently irrigated and promptly removed when they become dormant.
- **Shrubs-** Shrubs in wildland fires can serve as "ladder fuels", enabling fire to travel from the ground into shrubs and from there to trees. Low-growing, non-resinous varieties of shrubs should be planted in small clumps away from each other and away from trees. Do not place them directly beneath windows or vents or where they might spread under wooden decks.

- **Trees-** Trees can be significant source of firebrands and, when burning, can ignite nearby shrubs, trees or structures. When planting trees, do not place them near structures and allow plenty of room between trees.