

For most people, a home in the country represents a peaceful contrast to fast-paced city life, providing an opportunity to maintain a job in the city while enjoying the aesthetics of a country home.

The movement of people from towns and cities to rural areas is a national trend that began in the 1960s. For many, a rural home has become a dream come true. However, homes are often built for aesthetic values and economic considerations. In many cases little regard is given to fire protection. Placed in rural wildland settings, often called the wildland/urban interface in which fire is a natural part of the ecology, these homes are in peril.

Every year many homes in the wildland/urban interface are damaged or destroyed. Many of these homes could have been saved if simple precautions had been taken before a fire struck. By taking steps to protect their property, homeowners can prevent their dream home from turning into a nightmare.

The most effective fire prevention device yet invented is YOUR attitude. With a positive, proactive attitude you can enjoy your country home with confidence by following the prevention measures suggested here.



Crown fires are much more difficult to contain than surface fires, making them much more destructive.

Before you move

Before you move, examine the location:

- How far is it to the nearest town?
- Are the roads hard-surfaced and wide enough for easy access by emergency vehicles?
- Are there any natural obstacles that may prevent access, such as rivers or streams which routinely flood?
- Are roads cleared of snow in the winter?
- Are roads dead-end, which will prevent emergency vehicles from turning around?
- Is there a water supply nearby for fire department use? If not, how far is it to a water supply, such as a pond, lake or fire hydrant?
- Are electrical and telephone lines buried or above ground?
- Are roads named or numbered to easily identify the location?

Remember that emergency vehicles need more room to maneuver and turn than passenger vehicles. Without adequate access, a property may be difficult, sometimes even impossible, to reach with emergency equipment. Properties with good access have the following characteristics:

- roads that accommodate two-way traffic
- more than one way into and out of the property
- room for emergency vehicles to turn and maneuver
- bridges, if in the area, can accommodate heavy emergency vehicles
- roads and properties easily identified by name or number

After you move

After you move, there are a number of things you can do to protect your home from fire.



Surface fuels, such as low-growing shrubs and debris, provide the pathway for making a surface fire a crown fire.

For additional information:

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Country Living at It's Best

What every country home owner needs to know about fire!

Inside the home

Fires starting within the home can threaten your safety whether you live in the city or the country. Each room deserves special consideration.

Kitchen

- keep flammable curtains and towels away from burners and stoves
- move handles of pots and pans containing hot liquids away from the front of the stove
- keep a fire extinguisher in the kitchen
- make sure electrical outlets are designed to handle appliance loads

Living Room

- install a screen on your fireplace
- store fireplace ashes in a metal container and dispose of them outside, away from structures
- clean fireplace, chimney and flue annually
- do not use extension cords.

Bedroom

- turn off electric blankets and heating pads when not in use
- do not smoke in bed

Bathroom

- unplug curling irons and hair dryers when done; store in a safe location until cool.
- keep flammable items such as towels away from wall and floor heaters.
- do not use electrical appliances in bathtubs
- keep radios away from wet areas
- install ground fault outlets at all electrical outlets around where water is used

Garage, Basement and Entire Home

- store matches and lighters out of the reach of children
- place the fire department's phone number and directions to your home next to the telephone
- install child safety caps on electrical outlets
- install smoke detectors between living and sleeping areas; change the batteries in the spring and fall
- disconnect electrical tools and appliances when not in use
- install a solid wood door with self-closing hinges between the living areas and garage
- install fire extinguishers in the basement and garage
- dispose of oily rags in metal containers
- store combustibles away from heat sources such as hot water heaters and furnace

- allow hot tools such as glue guns and soldering irons to cool before storing
- store flammables such as paint, varnish and paint remover in metal cabinets
- change furnace filters monthly
- install a residential sprinkler system with a water source having an alternate source of power in the event of a power failure

Outside your home

Living in the country can put you and your home at risk from wildfire. Taking steps to keep the area surrounding your home safe not only can prevent fires, but can make a big difference if a wildfire threatens your home.

Yard

- stack woodpiles at least 30 feet from all structures and clear away flammable vegetation within 10 feet of the woodpile
- locate fuel tanks at least 30 feet from structures and 10 feet from any combustibles
- remove leaf and debris piles
- if open burning is allowed, obtain a burn permit to burn debris
- if burn barrels are allowed, clear flammable materials at least 10 feet around the barrel and cover the open top with ¼-inch wire mesh
- mow your yard regularly
- if you have an external water source, such as a pond or swimming pool, make sure it is accessible to the fire department

Landscape

Your home landscape needs three zones of defense against encroaching wildfire. A transition between the zones creates breaks in the path to slow advancing flames. A minimum distance of 100 to 150 feet around your home is required to accommodate these zones. Steep slopes or windswept exposures require greater distances.

Fire-resistant plants should be used in the zones of defense. Characteristics of fire-resistant plants are:

- little or no seasonal accumulation of dead vegetation
- open, loose branching
- non-resinous woody material (avoid conifers)
- low volume of total vegetation
- high moisture content in leaves
- drought tolerance
- slow growth, which means they require less pruning



Zone 1: Moist and Trim

Zone 1 includes the first 30 to 50 feet surrounding your home. Low growing, fire-resistant plants in this zone resist catching fire and provide little fuel. Turf, ground cover, annuals and perennials form a greenbelt that, if regularly watered and maintained, eliminates dry plant litter. Occasional shrubs and trees located at least 10 feet from the house are allowed.

Zone 2: Low and Sparse

Zone 2 includes the area 50 to 100 feet surrounding your home. Slow-growing, drought-tolerant shrubs and ground covers in this zone keep fire near ground level. Native vegetation can be retained here if it is low-growing and does not accumulate dry, flammable material.

Zone 3: High and Clean

Zone 3 includes the area 100 to 150 feet surrounding your home. Fire intensity is reduced where there is less fuel available. Native trees in this zone are thinned and dry debris is removed. This zone requires major pruning every three to five years.



Danger times 10

1. untreated wood shake shingles
2. home located on a slope
3. wood deck facing slope
4. large glass windows facing slope
5. unprotected louvers in front

6. firewood stored too close to home
7. inadequate vegetation clearance
8. tree limbs overhanging roof.
9. chimney spark arrestor missing
10. no access for emergency vehicles

Roof

Your roof is the most vulnerable part of your house and should be constructed of fire resistant roofing materials. A sprinkler system with a water supply is recommended. Additional steps homeowners can take to reduce the risk of fire include:

- clearing leaves or debris from your roof and gutters
- removing overhanging dead limbs
- removing any tree branches within 10 feet of the chimney
- covering the chimney outlet with a nonflammable screen of ½-inch mesh

Outbuildings

- have tools such as a shovel, hoe, rake, garden hose and buckets available for use in a wildfire emergency
- store lawn mowers, snow blowers, tillers, garden tractors, etc., in a storage building away from the house
- store gasoline in approved metal containers away from sources of ignition
- keep vegetation cleared at least 10 feet in all directions from gasoline and diesel fuel storage tanks
- make sure wiring to fuel pumps on fuel storage tanks is in good condition
- make sure electric service lines, fuse boxes and circuit breaker panels are installed and maintained properly

