

# READY, SET, GO!

New Jersey

YOUR PERSONAL WILDLAND FIRE ACTION GUIDE



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## New Jersey Wildfire Action Guide

Saving Lives and Property  
through Advance Planning



**W**hile spring and fall (see inset for detail) are the primary wildfire season, the fire season is now a year-round reality in many areas, requiring firefighters and residents to be on heightened alert for the threat of wildland fire.

Each year, wildland fires consume hundreds of homes in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI). Studies show that as many as 80 percent of the homes lost to wildland fires could have been saved if their owners had only followed a few simple fire-safe practices. In addition, wildland fire related civilian deaths occur because people wait too long to leave their home. Leaving late is a growing national problem, as well as a local concern in New Jersey.

The New Jersey Forest Fire Service and your local fire department takes every precaution to help protect you and your property from wildland fire. However, the reality is that in a major wildland fire event, there will simply not be enough fire resources or firefighters to defend every home.

Successfully preparing for a wildland fire enables you to take personal responsibility for protecting yourself, your family and your property. In this Ready, Set, Go! Action Guide, our goal is to provide the tips and tools you need to prepare for a wildland fire threat; have situational awareness when a fire starts; and to leave early when instructed to do so.

The Ready, Set, Go! Program works in complimentary and collaborative fashion with the Firewise® Communities Program and other existing wildland fire public education efforts. Utilizing firefighters, it amplifies their messages to individuals to better achieve the common goal of wildland fire preparedness.

Fire is, and always has been, a natural occurrence in the wildland. Historically, our forest burned periodically long before we built homes there. Wildland fire, fueled by a build-up of dry vegetation and driven by seasonal hot dry winds, are extremely dangerous and difficult to control. Many residents have built homes and landscaped without fully understanding the impact a fire can have on them and few have adequately prepared their families for a quick evacuation should a wildfire occur.



Its not a question of **if**, but rather **when**, the next major wildland fire will occur. Through advance planning, understanding and preparation, we can all be partners in the wildland fire solution. The tips on the following pages are designed to create heightened awareness and a more fire-safe environment for you, your family and firefighters.

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## Living in the Wildland Urban Interface

Ready, Set, Go! begins with a house that can survive on its own.



## Defensible Space Works!

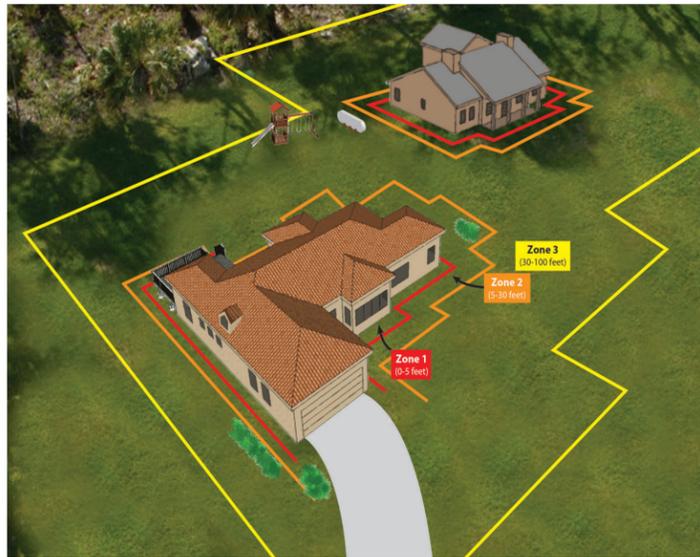
If you live next to a naturally vegetated area, often called the Wildland-Urban Interface, you must create “defensible space” around your home. This buffer zone is created by removing weeds and brush and managing other vegetation on your property. An effective defensible space reduces the wildland fire threat to your home and is a critical component of a home that can survive without firefighters.



A home within approximately one mile or less of a forested area, or other wildland vegetation, will be subjected to wind-blown embers. Wind-driven embers, also called firebrands, can threaten homes far from the actual flaming fire front. Use this Action Guide to read about and understand the actions you can take to be prepared well before a wildfire occurs.



## What is Defensible Space?



Defensible space is that area between your home and an approaching wildland fire where the vegetation has been managed through careful selection and maintenance and some replacement, pruning and thinning, to reduce the wildland fire threat and improve the chances of your home surviving with little or no assistance from firefighters.

During a major wildfire event, firefighting resources are spread thin and therefore these resources may not be available to protect every home.

### ZONE ONE

Zone One: 0-5 feet

- Use hard surfaces such as concrete or noncombustible rock mulch.
- Use non-woody, low growing herbaceous vegetation.
- Do not store firewood or other combustible materials next to your home or under your attached deck.

### ZONE TWO

Zone Two: 5-30 feet (or to the property line)

- Create “islands” of vegetation groupings.
- Remove ladder fuels. Create separation between low level vegetation and tree branches.
- Remove leaf and needle debris from the yard.

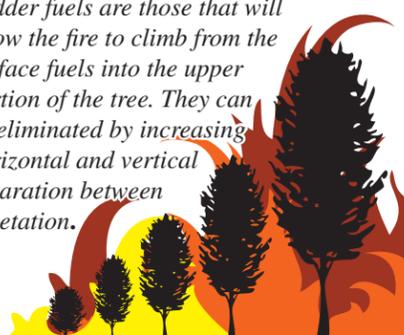
### ZONE THREE

Zone Three: 30 – 100 feet (or to the property line)

- Create and maintain a minimum of 10 feet between the crowns of trees.
- Remove ladder fuels. Create separation between low level vegetation and tree branches.
- Remove dead trees and shrubs.

#### Ladder Fuels

Ladder fuels are those that will allow the fire to climb from the surface fuels into the upper portion of the tree. They can be eliminated by increasing horizontal and vertical separation between vegetation.



## What is a Hardened Home?

Construction materials and the quality of the defensible space surrounding it are what gives a home the best chance to survive a wildland fire. Embers from a wildland fire will find the weak link in your home's fire protection scheme and gain the upper hand because of a small, overlooked or seemingly inconsequential factor. However, there are measures you can take to safeguard your home from wildfire. While you may not be able to accomplish all the measures listed below, each will increase your home's, and possibly your family's, safety and survival during a wildland fire.



*This clubhouse was separated from the actual fire/flame front by a tennis court (not seen in this photo but immediately to the right) and the embers from the wildfire ignited these evergreen shrubs next to the building.*

### ROOFS

The roof is the most vulnerable part of your home because of its large horizontal surface where embers can land and ignite combustible materials and debris. Roof valleys, open ends of barrel tiles, rain gutters and locations where the roof intersects a wall can all be vulnerable. Remove debris from roof and gutters on a regular basis.

### EAVES

Open eave construction is more vulnerable to embers and flames. “Boxed-in” or soffited eaves will provide better protection.

### VENTS

Embers can enter the attic and other enclosed spaces through vents and ignite combustible materials. Vents that provide a vertical surface to wind-driven embers, for example, vents in open-eave construction and gable end vents, are particularly more vulnerable to embers.

### WALLS

Combustible siding and trim will be vulnerable to flames from ignited vegetation or debris at the base of the wall. This fire can then spread vertically to the windows and eave area. An effective noncombustible zone close to your home is particularly important if you have combustible siding.

If you live in a mobile home install skirting made from a noncombustible material (e.g., metal or fiber-cement) around the perimeter. Provide adequate venting per the building code.

### WINDOWS and DOORS

Embers can enter through open windows and through gaps at the edge of garage doors. Plants or combustible materials stored under windows can be ignited by embers. The resulting flames can break window glass and ignite combustible frames.

### BALCONIES and DECKS

Embers can collect under balconies and decks, igniting vegetative debris and other combustible materials, including the deck. The flames can then enter the home through walls or broken glass in the window or sliding glass door. Shade coverings for decks should be made from noncombustible materials. Carpeted decks should be avoided.

# Tour a Wildfire Ready Home

**Inside:** Keep working fire extinguishers on hand. Install smoke alarms on each level of your home and near bedrooms. Test them monthly and change the batteries twice a year.

**Chimney:** Cover your chimney and stovepipe outlets with a noncombustible screen of 1/2-inch wire mesh to reduce the size and energy of embers leaving the chimney, this will reduce the chance of escaping embers starting a fire. Make sure that your tree branches are at least 10 feet away from the chimney.

**Walls:** Wood, vinyl and other plastic siding and trim products are combustible. Consider building or remodeling with ignition-resistant or noncombustible building materials, such as brick, cement, masonry or stucco.

**Deck/Patio Cover:** Keep your under-deck area clear of combustible materials and debris. If available in your area, install decking that is approved for use in wildfire prone areas. If the underside of the deck is enclosed be sure to provide adequate ventilation to avoid moisture-related degradation problems.

**Address:** Make sure your address is clearly visible from the road.

**Home Site and Yard:** Ensure you have 100 feet of defensible space (managed vegetation) around your home (or to your property line). Note that your defensible space zone may need to be enlarged in severe hazard areas. This may mean looking past what you own to determine the impact a common slope or neighbors' yard will have on your property during a wildland fire. Cut dry weeds and grass before noon when temperatures are cooler to reduce the chance of a spark starting a fire. Remember the importance of routine maintenance. Keep woodpiles, propane tanks and combustible materials away from your home and other structures such as detached garages, barns and sheds. Ensure that trees are far away from power lines.

**Roof:** Your roof is the most vulnerable part of your home because of its large horizontal surface and ability to capture wind-blown embers. Use a Class A fire-rated roof covering, such as composition shingles, metal or tile, when roofing or re-roofing. Block any spaces between roof decking and covering to minimize ember intrusion. Clear pine needles, leaves and other debris from your roof and gutters. Prune tree branches within 10 feet of your roof.

**Eaves:** Box in eaves with a noncombustible or ignition resistant material.

**Vents:** Vents on homes can be vulnerable to the entry of embers that can potentially result in the ignition of combustible materials in the spaces behind the vents (for example, in the attic). At a minimum, all vent openings should be covered with 1/8-inch corrosion resistant metal mesh.

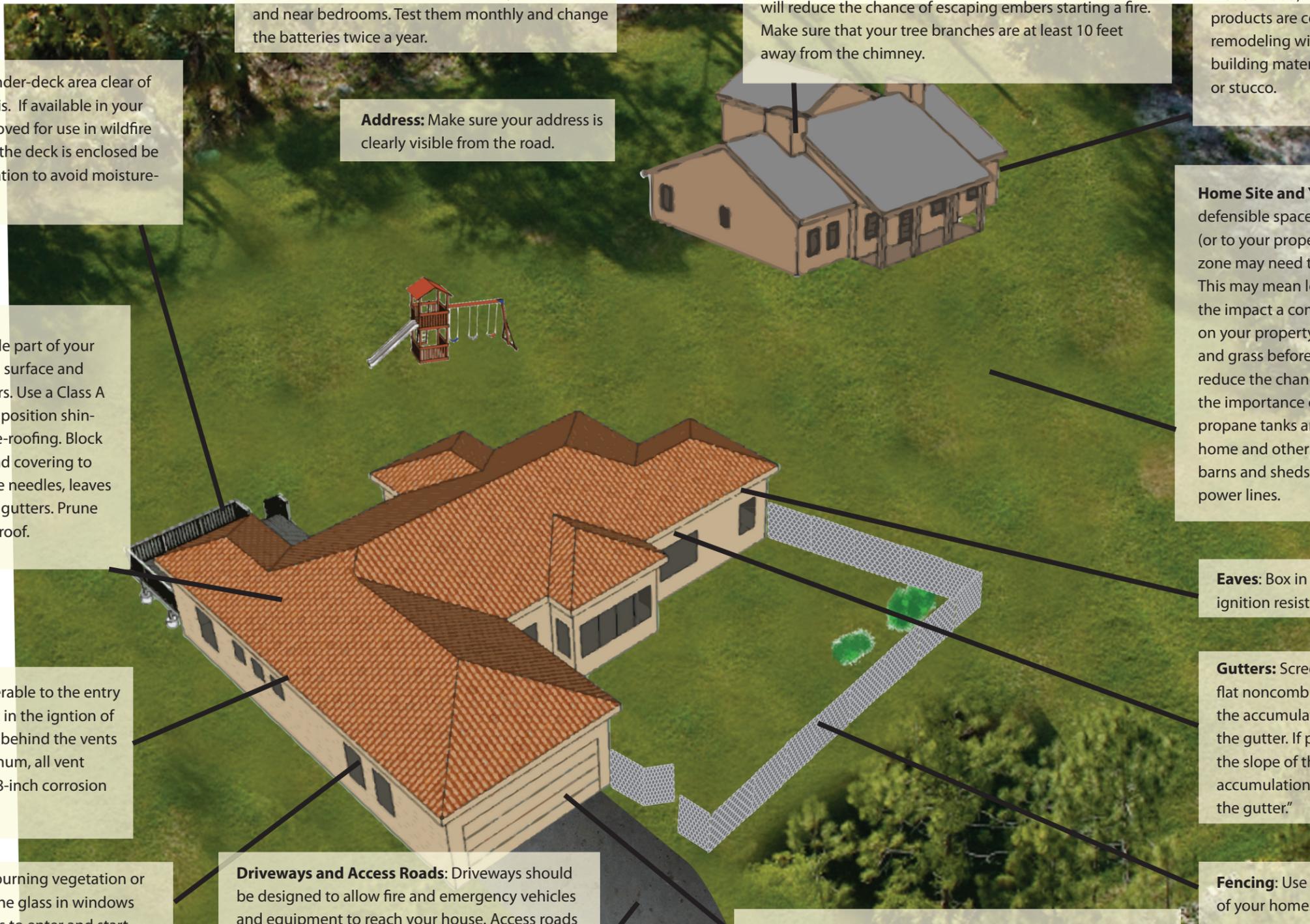
**Gutters:** Screen or cover rain gutters with a flat noncombustible device. This will minimize the accumulation of pine needles and leaves in the gutter. If possible, the device should follow the slope of the roof. This will minimize the accumulation of debris on the roof, behind the gutter."

**Windows:** Radiant heat from burning vegetation or a nearby structure can cause the glass in windows to break. This will allow embers to enter and start internal fires. Single-pane and large picture windows are particularly vulnerable to glass breakage. Install dual-paned windows with a minimum of one pane being tempered glass to reduce the chance of breakage during a fire. Limit the size and number of windows in your home that face large areas of vegetation.

**Driveways and Access Roads:** Driveways should be designed to allow fire and emergency vehicles and equipment to reach your house. Access roads should have a minimum 10-foot clearance on either side of the traveled section of the roadway and should allow for two-way traffic. Ensure that all gate openings are wide enough to accommodate emergency equipment. Trim trees and shrubs overhanging the road to a minimum of 13 1/2 feet to allow emergency vehicles to pass.

**Garage:** Install weather stripping around and under the vehicle access door. This will reduce the intrusion of embers. If the garage is attached to the home, install a solid door with self-closing hinges between living areas and garage. Do not store combustibles and flammable liquids near combustion equipment (e.g., hot water heater).

**Fencing:** Use noncombustible fencing within 5 feet of your home.

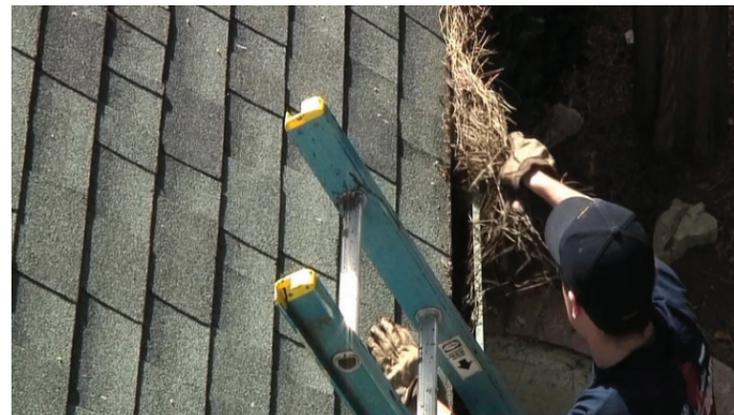


# READY, SET, GO!

## New Jersey Create Your Own Wildland Fire Action Plan

Now that you've done everything you can to protect your home, it's time to prepare your family. Your **Wildfire Action Plan** must be prepared with all members of your household well in advance of a fire. Use these checklists to help you gain a situational awareness of the threat and to prepare your RSG Wildfire Action Guide.

## Ready – Preparing for the Fire Threat



- Create a **Family Disaster Plan** that includes meeting locations and communication plans and rehearse it regularly. Include in your plan the evacuation of large animals such as horses.
- Have fire extinguishers on hand and train your family how to use them.
- Ensure that your family knows where your gas, electric and water main shut-off controls are and how to use them.
- Plan several different evacuation routes.
- Designate an emergency meeting location outside the fire hazard area.
- Assemble an emergency supply kit as recommended by the American Red Cross. Keep an extra kit in your car. (See Emergency Supplies Section, page 10.)
- Appoint an out-of-area friend or relative as a point of contact so you can communicate with family members.
- Maintain a list of emergency contact numbers posted near your phone and in your emergency supply kit.
- Use a portable radio or scanner so you can stay updated on the fire.

### HIKING AND CAMPING

- Take long pants and a long sleeve shirt made of natural fibers (e.g., cotton).
- Have good maps and pre-plan potential escape routes.

## Set – Situational Awareness when a Fire Starts

- Evacuate as soon as you are notified. Alert family members and neighbors.
- Dress in appropriate clothing (i.e., clothing made from natural fibers, such as cotton, and work boots). Have goggles and a dry bandana or particle mask handy.
- Ensure that you have your emergency supply kit on hand.
- Stay tuned to your TV or local radio stations for updates, or check the fire department Web site.
- Remain close to your house, drink plenty of water and keep an eye on your family and pets until you are ready to leave.

### HIKING AND CAMPING

- Maintain awareness when hiking or camping during the spring and fall, the typical wildfire season in this state.

### INSIDE CHECKLIST

- Close all windows and doors, leaving doors unlocked.
- Open window shades and curtains and close metal shutters (if installed).
- Move furniture away from windows and doors.
- Turn off pilot lights for gas appliances. Turn off the air conditioning.
- Leave your lights on so firefighters can see your house under smoky conditions.



### OUTSIDE CHECKLIST

- Gather up combustible items, such as patio furniture and cushions, from the outside of the house and bring them inside.
- Turn off propane tanks and other gas at the meter.
- If you are on a municipal water system, don't leave sprinklers on or water running - they can reduce water pressure.
- Leave exterior lights on.
- Back your car into the driveway to facilitate a quick departure when ready to evacuate.
- Have a ladder available.
- Cover attic and crawl space vents with pre-cut plywood or commercial covers if time permits.

### IF YOU ARE TRAPPED: SURVIVAL TIPS

- Shelter away from outside walls.
- Bring garden hoses inside house so embers and flames don't destroy them.
- Patrol inside your home, and look in your attic for spot or smoldering fires. Extinguish them.
- Wear long sleeved shirts and long pants made of natural fibers such as cotton. It is also important for campers and hikers to have this clothing in case they become trapped while out.
- Stay hydrated.
- Ensure you can exit the home if it catches fire (remember if it's hot inside the house, it is four to five times hotter outside).
- Fill sinks and tubs for an emergency water supply.
- Place wet towels under doors to keep smoke and embers out.
- After the fire has passed, check around your house and on your roof and extinguish any small smoldering or burning fires..
- Check inside the attic for embers and evidence of smoldering fires.
- If there are fires that you cannot extinguish with a small amount of water or in a short period of time, call 9-1-1.

# Go – Leave Early

By leaving early, you give your family the best chance of surviving a wildland fire. You also help firefighters by keeping roads clear of congestion, enabling them to move more freely and do their job in a safer environment.

## WHEN TO LEAVE

Leave early enough to avoid being caught in fire, smoke or road congestion. If you are advised to leave, don't hesitate!

## WHERE TO GO

Evacuate to a predetermined location (it should be a low-risk area, such as a well-prepared neighbor or relative's house, a Red Cross shelter or evacuation center, motel, etc.)

## HOW TO GET THERE

Have several travel routes in case one route is blocked by the fire or by emergency vehicles and equipment. Choose an escape route away from the fire.

## WHAT TO TAKE

Take your emergency supply kit containing your family and pet's necessary items.



## EMERGENCY SUPPLIES

The American Red Cross recommends every family have an emergency supply kit assembled. Use the checklist below to help assemble yours. For more information on emergency supplies, visit the American Red Cross Web site at [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org).

- Three-day supply of water (one gallon per person per day).
- Non-perishable food for all family members and pets (three-day supply).
- First aid kit.
- Flashlight, battery-powered radio, and extra batteries.
- An extra set of car keys, credit cards, cash or traveler's checks.
- Sanitation supplies.
- Extra eyeglasses or contact lenses.
- Important family documents and contact numbers.
- Map marked with evacuation routes.
- Prescriptions or special medications.
- Family photos and other irreplaceable items and easily carried valuables.
- Personal computers (information on hard drives and disks or flash drives).
- Chargers for cell phones, laptops, etc.

## HIKING AND CAMPING

- Use your planned escape routes to leave the area.
- Try to avoid areas of heavy vegetation and avoid cutting across hillsides, particularly at mid-slope.
- If the fire is very close, drop your equipment and run to safety.

Write up your Wildland Fire Action Guide and post it in a location where every member of your family can see it. Rehearse it with your family.

## My Personal Wildland Fire Action Guide

During High Fire Danger days in your area, monitor your local media for information and be ready to implement your plan. Hot, dry and windy conditions create the perfect environment for a wildland fire. \*

Important Phone Numbers:

Out-of-State Contact: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Work: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Evacuation Routes: \_\_\_\_\_

Where to Go: \_\_\_\_\_

Location of Emergency Supply Kit: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

\* Check the New Jersey Forest Fire Service website at [njwildfire.org](http://njwildfire.org) for current Fire Danger ratings.





# READY, SET, GO!

## Residential Safety Checklist Tips To Improve Family and Property Survival During A Wildland Fire

<b>Home</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
1. Does your home have a metal, composition, or tile (or other Class A) roof with capped ends and drip edge at the roof edge.?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Are the rain gutters and roof free of leaves, needles and branches?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Are all vent openings screened with 1/8 inch mesh metal screen?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Are approved spark arrestors on chimneys?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Does the house have noncombustible or ignition resistant siding material?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Are the eaves "boxed in" using noncombustible materials?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Are the windows double-paned?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Is the underdeck area free of combustible material?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Is all firewood at least 30 feet from the house?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Defensible Space</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
1. Has dead vegetation been removed in the recommended defensible space area? (Consider adding distance if your home is on a steep slope.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Is there separation between shrubs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Have ladder fuels been removed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Is there a clean and green area extending at least 30 feet from the house?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Has the 0-5 ft. noncombustible zone been developed and maintained?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Is there recommended separation maintained between trees and crowns?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Emergency Access</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
1. Is the home address visible from the street?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Is the home address made of noncombustible materials?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Are street signs present at every intersection leading to the house?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Are street signs made of noncombustible materials?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Is flammable vegetation within 10 feet of the driveway cleared and are overhanging obstructions removed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. If a long driveway is present, does it have a suitable turnaround area?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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[www.wildlandfireRSG.org](http://www.wildlandfireRSG.org)

