



EMBERS, SPARKS AND FIREWORKS
What you can do to improve your home's safety

July 4 2019

A fire in the wildland creates its own local weather conditions. Depending on the fire's size and intensity, these increased wind velocities and unusual directions can send burning fragments of burning material swirling far and wide, resulting in embers raining down nearly a mile away from the actual fire itself. These embers can and often do cause additional spot fires, depending on the nature and condition of the vegetation in the area, which has often become further dried and flammable by the winds associated with the fire.

In the recent California wildland fires, spot fires rapidly increased the size, spread and damage of the fires, taxing firefighters' abilities to protect homes and lives, even those in the suburbs nearby.

What can you do now and in the event of a wildland fire near you to prevent or lessen the likelihood that embers raining down in your neighborhood would cause your home to catch fire? This needs to be a community effort, because if your next door neighbor's home catches fire, your home would be at increased risk, too.

Here are six things that CalFire recommends that you can do:

1) Create a fireproof barrier, a border around your home with non-flammable materials such as stone, gravel or bare-mineral soil, immediately next to exterior walls and five feet out. Create a "Green Zone" that extends 30 feet out from all structures, using plantings of fire-resistant vegetation. This reduces the risk of burning embers landing next to your home or decks and igniting them. Avoid wooden lattices, which act as piles of kindling. Create a 100-foot fire defensible space or to your property line, and work together with neighbors.

2) Use fireproof materials for your roof and, if possible, siding. Cover all roof ventilation ports with 1/8-inch metal screen secured flush with the surface to prevent embers from being sucked into your roof attic and crawl space, and catching your home on fire.

3) Keep your roof and rain gutters clean and free of dried, flammable vegetative litter. This will reduce the risk of flaming embers landing and igniting a spot fire on your roof.

4) Minimize or eliminate wooden decks. This reduces the risk of flaming embers landing on dry wooden decks and in spaces between decking, and igniting a fire that quickly spreads to the home itself.

5) Frame your windows with metal and thoroughly seal all framed areas with silicone caulk. This will reduce the likelihood of flaming embers lodging in dry wooden surfaces with cracks leading to interior wooden framing of your home that would easily ignite.

6) Make sure fire trucks can access your home. Clearly identify your address at the nearest main road with four-inch reflective numbers.

Some people install sprinklers on their roof that can be charged and ready if fire approaches or burning ember storms occur. However, it is CRITICAL to conserve water available for fire fighters to use, so do not just turn on the roof sprinklers and evacuate! Label the valves with reflective-lettered non-flammable signs that would activate your roof sprinklers so that fire fighters staging at your home and community will see how to make use of your system if you have evacuated. Similarly, place garden hoses in easily-visible locations and connected to nearby faucets so that fire fighters or your neighbors may be able to quickly extinguish spot fires around your home.

ONE LESS SPARK, ONE LESS WILDFIRE.....

Each year, people clearing dry grass with mowers and metal-bladed weed eaters create sparks that cause wildland fires. Avoid this risk by clearing areas before the grass is dead and flammable. Alternately, mow on foggy mornings, when fuel moistures are higher and flashy, fire-prone grasses are less likely to catch fire from a flying spark.

Also, chains dragging behind vehicles on paved or gravel roads can create sparks that can easily spread to nearby dry grass and catch fire. This is what reportedly caused the devastating Trabing Fire in Santa Cruz County on June 20, 2008. If you tow a trailer or vehicle, please make sure all metal chains are secured and well-away from road surfaces. Clear dry grass six to ten feet out from along your driveway and private road.

If you or your guests enjoy a fireplace warmth coziness on cool coastal nights, please make sure your chimney's spark arrest screen is intact and fully functional. Chimney sparks could easily catch dry materials on your roof, in your rain gutters, or in surrounding vegetation, leading to a larger conflagration.

Summer barbeques are wonderful, but have a hose or fire extinguisher ready, and close all BBQ vents when cooking is done.

CELEBRATE INDEPENDENCE DAY WITHOUT FIREWORKS ... JUST BE RESPONSIBLE

"Safe and sane" fireworks are sold in some local areas. While these are fun and exciting, and even financially support some good local causes, please consider where and when you ignite these sparks if you buy them. Please be mindful of wildland fire risks. Wet your street or driveway surfaces first, have a bucket of water ready for expended fireworks and closely supervise all who are participating.

[Note: Last month's editorial inadvertently contained an error regarding recommended size of reflective lettering for address signs. The correct recommended size is four inches, rather than four feet.]