



WOULD FIREFIGHTERS DECIDE TO RISK THEIR LIVES TO PROTECT YOUR HOME FROM WILDLAND FIRE?

Ten steps you can take to make your home more defensible

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When wildland fires happen, responding firefighters are tasked with evaluating where to prioritize their efforts to best protect a community. It can quickly become a matter of triage: should they risk their lives to protect this home, or pass it by and defend another that poses less risk to their own lives and a better chance of success to save?

It is also important to remember that in a large wildland fire, the firefighters responding to your neighborhood may not be from your area so they will have no special relationship at all to the community. Their job is to provide fire protection so they will look at your place primarily from a tactical point of view.

So how do they decide? The answer is sometimes complex but primarily rests on the size of the fire, the terrain, weather conditions, the accessibility of a neighborhood or a home, and how defensible the space is surrounding them.

To make your home one firefighters want to defend, here are ten steps you can take now. Please take note that Steps 3-6 are required by law in most areas of Santa Cruz County.

1. **Signage:** Can firefighters find your house? Do your roads have clearly readable street names? Is your house numbered and visible from the street? Did you use at least 4" tall reflective numbers? Remember, defenders may arrive at night, it could be extremely smoky, and the firefighters assigned to your neighborhood may be unfamiliar with the area. Finding your house is the first step in defending it. *Bonus:* if you have a medical emergency in the future, clearly marked streets and homes mean faster response times and may just save yours or a family member's life!
2. **Access:** Is vegetation cleared back from the roads into your neighborhood? If fuel is right up to the edge of your road, do you think a fire truck will want to drive down it, especially if they don't know the area? Can a car and a fire truck pass each other on your road? Are overhanging branches limbed up at least 20-feet? Is there a place for a large fire truck to turn

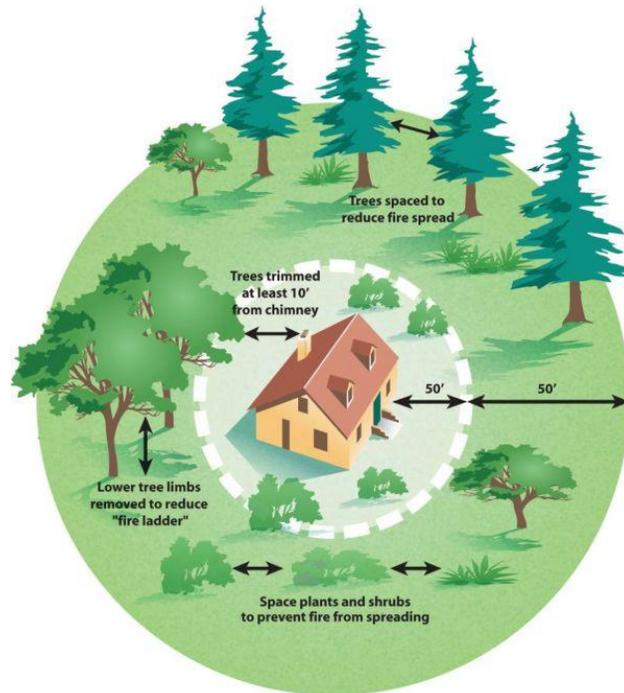
around? If not, a fire truck may not be able to make it down your road. The same access considerations apply to your own driveway. If you have a long driveway, additional reflective signs about turn-around and water supply are also helpful.

3. **Home Zone:** Firefighters know what to look for when they defend a home. What flammable items are immediately next to your home? If there is fuel right up to your house, leaf debris and duff on your roof, etc. yours will be a hard home to defend. Start by looking at your house like a firefighter would. Clean out the gutters, sweep off your roof. Screen your attic vents. Do you have wooden shutters on your home? Wooden shutters and lattice act as kindling. Do you have things stacked up against your home like brooms, plastic garbage cans, straw welcome mats, wood piles? If so, relocate the wood piles to 30' away from your home and move easily-flammable items further away from the actual walls of your home. Start here and protect your home first.

4. **Five-Foot Safety Zone:** Next, look for things that can catch fire that are within five feet of your home or outbuildings. This can include shrubs, overhanging branches, patio furniture, propane-fired BBQs, dog houses, wooden privacy screens, wooden lattices, decks, gates, etc. Pay special attention to shrubs and other flammable objects near your windows. Intense heat can cause windows to crack or break. You can make this zone safer by moving portable items farther away, or making sure there is no leaf litter, grass, plants or other easily flammable items near fixed structures like decks and fences. If firefighters can move easily around your structures, run hoses without a lot of interference and can spend their time defending rather than removing potentially flammable objects that are in their way, your home will have a better chance of surviving. In firefighting, seconds can count!

5. **Thirty-Foot Safety Zone:** Firefighters are going to look at this too. Is there a big enough safety zone around your house to make it safe for firefighters to defend your home? What about their fire trucks? Wildland fires can reach temperatures of almost 1500 degrees Fahrenheit. This space is needed to slow or stop the spread of wildfire, and it protects your home from catching fire—either from flying embers, direct flame contact or radiant heat. In this zone, you want to remove all dead plants, mow grasses and weeds, and have wide spacing between any living plants. Limb any trees up 10 feet from the ground.

6. **Hundred-Foot Safety Zone:** After accomplishing steps #1 through #5, the next step is to look at the final seventy-foot surrounding your structures. As with the thirty-foot zone, you'll want to remove all dead plants, keep grasses and weeds low and have wide spacing between living plants, keeping them limbed up 10 feet from the ground. The good news is that the plants don't have to be quite so far apart as they are in the thirty-foot zone, although you'll want to keep your eye of plantings that can create a "ladder" from the ground to shrubs, up into treetops. "Crown" fires are much more dangerous than ground fires and a lot harder to fight. The goal here is to slow the rate of spread if possible and keep the fire out of treetops. Anything you can do to make your property look good to firefighters while they are assessing the defensibility of your neighborhood may make the difference.



7. **You and Your Neighbors:** Now that you've got your property in good shape, take a look beyond your property line at how dense the vegetation is on your neighbors' properties, especially close to the road as this may affect the firefighters' ability to reach your property. Your next goal should be to create a consistent swathe of reduced fuels in your area. Fire does not follow property lines or jurisdictional boundaries. Sometimes simply doing steps #1 through #6 on your property and having conversations about what you are doing and why is enough to inspire your neighbors to start doing this work themselves. In Bonny Doon, five or six neighbors working together have created up to five acres of defensible space that better protects all of their properties. The more neighbors that do this work, the safer you all will be!

8. **Funding for community-wide projects.** If your neighbors do not have the resources to do the work themselves, sometimes neighbors can work together to help them, or there may be other resources or funding that can help. SIGN UP WITH FIRE SAFE SANTA CRUZ COUNTY FOR COMMUNITY CHIPPING ASSISTANCE FOR YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD. Assistance is dependent upon available grant money and donations but signing up now will get your project in line for consideration. Here is the link to Fire Safe Santa Cruz County, where you can request chipping services for your neighborhood:

<https://www.firesafesantacruz.org/no-cost-chipping>

9. **Communications:** When disasters do occur it is crucial to stay informed. Here are must-have communications resources that can help you stay safe.

CodeRED, the regional reverse 911 emergency notification service for Santa Cruz County, keeps residents informed and prepared in the event of an emergency. Examples

of notices include evacuation notices, bio-terrorism alerts, missing person reports, and severe weather alerts. Cell (mobile) phones and VoIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol) phones must be registered to receive alerts. Google CodeRED Santa Cruz County to sign up. Note: Traditional landline telephones are already in the notification system.

Nixle is a free notification service that keeps you up-to-date about emergency weather events, road closings, public safety advisories, disasters, and other relevant information from public safety departments and schools. Google Nixle Santa Cruz County to sign up for alerts from local agencies. If you live or work in different counties, or if you have relatives or friends in other areas from which you want to receive information, you can sign up for alerts in other areas.

FEMA App: Download the FEMA app for your mobile phone for free on the App Store and Google Play. Learn what to do before, during and after emergencies with safety tips and receive weather alerts from the National Weather Service for up to five different locations anywhere in the United States. Get safety reminders and customize your emergency checklist.

10. **Share Your Success Stories:** Contact your local Fire Department and **Fire Safe Santa Cruz County** with your neighborhood success stories. Let all of us know about the work you have done to make your neighborhoods safer. Invite representatives from your local Fire jurisdiction out to see what you've accomplished. It is important for them to know that you've done your part to make sure your neighborhood is ready for them to defend. It also never hurts for them to take a tour of your area. They can use what they see to update the maps they keep for each neighborhood. Even if they are not the ones who end up defending your neighborhood, having up to date information will help whatever team is there to keep your neighborhood safe from wildland fires.

Here are two excellent videos for CalFire "Ready, Set, Go" information to help you learn how to prepare your family and property for best protection:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pPQpgSxG1n0>

<http://www.readyforwildfire.org/Get-Ready/>

Check out Fire Safe Santa Cruz County's Education tab for helpful information on fire preparedness: www.firesafesantacruz.org

Here is a link to the Homeowner's Summary Guide of Fire Prevention and Loss Reduction Laws: <http://www.fire.ca.gov/about/downloads/preventionlaws.pdf>

DO WHATEVER YOU CAN NOW. HELP THE FIREFIGHTERS WHO MAY BE WORKING TO PROTECT YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD THIS FIRE SEASON BY PREPARING FOR FIRE AHEAD OF TIME. WHEN YOU HAVE DONE THE WORK TO PREPARE YOUR PROPERTY, THERE IS A MUCH HIGHER CHANCE THAT FIREFIGHTERS WILL STAY TO DEFEND IT.

This information is brought to you by the Fire Safe Santa Cruz Education & Outreach Committee.