



FACT Sheet

NWCG Wildland/Urban
Interface Working Team

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USDA Forest Service

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Indian Affairs
Bureau of Land Management
US Fish & Wildlife Service
National Park Service

Federal Emergency
Management Agency

International Association of
Fire Chiefs

National Emergency
Management Association

National Fire
Protection Association

U.S. Fire Administration

State Forestry Organizations

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NATIONAL FIREWISE COMMUNITIES PROGRAM

Where You Live. How You Live.

Overview

Over the past century, America's population has nearly tripled, with much of the growth flowing into traditionally natural areas. This trend has created an extremely complex landscape that has come to be known as the wildland/urban interface. Encroaching development into forests, grasslands, and farms has put lives, property, and natural resources at risk from wildfire.

Unfortunately, once a wildfire ignites, firefighters are limited in what they can do to protect the values in its path. The National Firewise Communities Program is a national interagency program that encourages partnerships among communities, homeowners, private industry, tribes, and public agencies and officials to develop and implement local solutions for wildfire preparedness – before a fire starts.

Wildfires are a natural process. It is the vision of Firewise Communities that, with adequate planning and cooperation among varying interests, wildfires can occur without disastrous loss of life, property, and resources. To that end, the National Firewise Communities Program provides a number of wildland/urban interface resources for firefighter safety, community planning, landscaping, construction, and maintenance to help protect people, property, and natural resources from wildland fire.

Firewise Approach

The best approach to wildfire preparedness involves utilizing the wide range of Firewise practices. The National Firewise Communities Program offers a series of practical steps (landscaping, home construction and design, community planning, etc.) that individuals and communities can take to reduce their vulnerability to wildfire. Using at least one element recommended by the National Firewise Communities Program and adding other elements over time will begin to protect against the risk of fire in the wildland/urban interface.

Examples of Firewise techniques for property owners include creating a defensible space around residential structures by thinning trees and brush; choosing fire-resistant plants; selecting ignition-resistant building materials; positioning structures away from slopes; and working with firefighters to develop emergency plans.

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Sponsors

The Firewise Communities program is part of the National Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Program, which is directed and sponsored by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group's Wildland/Urban Interface Working Team (WUIWT), a consortium of wildland fire organizations and federal agencies responsible for wildland fire management in the United States. The WUIWT includes:

- USDA Forest Service
- USDI Bureau of Indian Affairs
- USDI Bureau of Land Management
- USDI Fish & Wildlife Service
- USDI National Park Service
- Federal Emergency Management Agency
- International Association of Fire Chiefs
- National Association of State Fire Marshals
- State Forestry Organizations
- National Emergency Management Association
- National Fire Protection Association

Programs

The Firewise Communities program provides a number of wildland/urban interface resources for firefighter safety, community planning, landscaping, construction, and maintenance.

- **Firewise Web Site:** www.firewise.org
The Firewise Web site provides educational information about wildland/urban interface fire to homeowners and agency fire staff. The interactive site features a wealth of information on how to mitigate wildfire risks at the homeowner and community levels. Web site visitors can view streaming video; download documents; browse an extensive list of helpful links; and use a searchable library of national, state, and local documents on a wide range of wildfire safety issues.
- **Firewise Communities/USA® Recognition Program**
To facilitate local solutions to wildfire preparedness goals, the Firewise Communities/USA program recognizes communities for working together to protect residents and property from fire in the wildland/urban interface. To be recognized as a Firewise Communities/USA site, local communities must create and implement a local plan with cooperative assistance from state forestry agencies and local fire staff. In addition, communities are required to continue regular maintenance and education to retain recognition status.
- **Firewise Communities Workshops**
The National Firewise Communities Program supports regional and local organizations interested in hosting Firewise workshops using materials supplied by the national program. Firewise Communities workshops prepare community leaders and fire service professionals to recognize wildland/urban interface fire hazards, make homes and landscapes Firewise, deliver fire education to residents, and incorporate Firewise planning into existing and developing areas of communities. These dynamic workshops can feature interactive discussions, mapping, and wildfire simulations. Firewise workshops are most successful when they are attended by a variety of community representatives, such as planners, business leaders, homeowner association members and emergency service professionals.

- ***Firewise Information Resources***

The National Firewise Communities Program is continuously developing informational materials to help community organizations understand and address wildland/urban interface issues. The Web-based Firewise Communities materials catalog provides more than 30 audiovisual and print materials for agencies, firefighters, homeowners, such as instructional videos, home construction checklists, mini-documentaries, CD-ROMs, school education projects, and more.

- ***Firewise Training and Education Resources***

A national education conference on wildland/urban interface fire, “Backyards and Beyond” is held every two years to bring together community decision-makers, residents, and professionals in fields as diverse as landscape architecture, insurance, forestry and emergency management. The 2006 conference will be held in Denver, Colorado from November 2-4. Courses on wildfire risk assessment for homes and communities are also provided periodically. The Firewise Learning Center at www.firewise.org provides a virtual classroom for courses on a number of topics.

- ***Firewise Community Support Resources***

The National Firewise Communities Program staff provides assistance and advice to communities engaged in planning and mitigation of wildland/urban interface fire hazards. In cooperation with state and federal partners, staff provides support to communities and their advocates by helping to identify local needs and integrate Firewise concepts into local comprehensive plans and multi-hazard mitigation plans; helping to connect communities with appropriate tools, techniques and technologies to further their Firewise activities.

History of Firewise

After the catastrophic fire season of 1985, representatives of NFPA and the USDA Forest Service met to discuss the increasing trend of wind-driven fire in populated areas, and formed what is now the National Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Program. In 1992, the advisory group for the program adopted the term “Firewise” to describe the state of being knowledgeable and prepared for wildfire in residential or urban settings. In 1999 the advisory group became the Wildland/Urban Interface (WUI) Working Team of the National Wildfire Coordinating Group, which oversees the National Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Program and its Firewise Communities program. The Firewise Web site launched in 1996, and the national workshop series began in 1999. Today, the Firewise Communities team continues its mission of wildland/urban interface fire education through its Web site, workshop series, community recognition program, and information resources.

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