

# READY! SET! GO!

YOUR PERSONAL WILDFIRE ACTION PLAN



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## Wildfire Action Plan

Saving Lives and Property  
through Advanced Planning



Dear Montecito Resident,

We realize that you choose to live in this community for many reasons including the mild climate and the beautiful lush environment. However, what many aren't prepared for when they move to this community is that wildland fires are expected events in this region due to the natural vegetation, periodic droughts and strong hot sundowner winds.

The Montecito Fire Protection District takes every precaution to help protect you and your property from wildfire. In the event of a major wildfire, however, there are simply not enough fire engines or firefighters to defend every home in the early stages of the incident. This reality requires you to take personal responsibility for protecting yourself, your family, and your property.

In Montecito, particularly in the foothills, wildfires are driven by hot "sundowner" winds. These winds are extremely dangerous and impossible to control, as we experienced during the November 2008 Tea Fire. Many residents have built their homes and landscaped without fully understanding the impact that wildland fires could have on them. The potential consequences of choosing to ignore an evacuation order until it is too late can put the homeowner in grave danger. We always recommend that residents comply with all evacuation orders resulting from a wildland fire

To assist residents, we have published this Ready! Set! Go! to give you the tips and tools to successfully prepare for a wildfire. It will give you guidance on retrofitting your home with fire-resistive features and it will help you create the necessary defensible space around your home. This publication will help you prepare your home, yourself, and your family so that you can go early, well ahead of a fast-approaching wildfire.

It's not a question of "if," but "when" the next major wildfire will occur. That's why the most important person in protecting your life and property is not the firefighter, but yourself. Through advance planning and preparation, we can all be ready for the next wildfire. I hope that you find the tips included in this publication helpful in creating heightened situational awareness and a more fire-safe environment for you and your family.

Stay safe,

Kevin Wallace  
Montecito Fire District Fire Chief

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# Get READY - Create a Defensible Home



Living in the  
Wildland Urban Interface  
and the  
Ember Zone  
Ready! Set! Go!  
Begins with a house  
that firefighters can  
defend.

## Defensible Space Works!

If you live next to a natural area, the Wildland Urban Interface, you must provide firefighters with the defensible space they need to protect your home. The buffer zone you create by removing weeds, brush and other vegetation helps to keep the fire away from your home and reduces the risks from flying embers.



A home within one mile of a natural area is in the **EMBER ZONE**.

Wind-driven embers can attach to your home. Your home must be prepared well before a fire occurs. Embers can destroy homes or neighborhoods far from the actual flame front of the fire.



# Get READY - What is Defensible Space?

**Defensible Space** is the area around a structure, free of flammable plants and objects that creates a zone in which firefighters can operate safely in order to help protect a home during a wildfire. This space is wide enough to prevent direct flame impingement and reduce the amount of radiant heat reaching the structure. The defensible space for each structure varies and depends on the type of vegetation and topography.

**Survivable Space:** Montecito Fire Department and most residents understand that during a major wild fire, resources (fire engines) are limited and it is unlikely every home will have a fire engine in their front yard. Can your home survive with no fire suppression equipment? Zones of clearance/thinning should be planned for the worst case situation.

The defensible/survivable space of each home site can be divided into three distinct conditions or bands (zones) radiating outward from around the house. Firescaping deals with the management of existing vegetation within the bands (zones), and the addition of ornamental plants with fire-resistant qualities or naturally low fuel volumes



## ZONE 1

Zone 1 is the first 5 to 10 feet around the outside walls of the house. Combustible materials in this area are close enough to bring the fire in contact with the building wall, deck, or porch. Planting and landscaping is best limited to very succulent groundcovers, gravel mulches, walkways, and green lawns. Hardscaping is extremely effective in this area.

## ZONE 2

Zone 2 begins at the perimeter of zone 1 and extends outward about 30 feet. Plants in this zone may be a combination of both native and introduced species. Eliminate ladder fuels, and remove any dead plants or portions of plants that may spread fire. Trees must be widely spaced to prevent crown fires. Shrubs should be low growing, well spaced and preferably with high moisture content. Groundcovers, lawn, or mowed irrigated pastures are also acceptable. Hardscaping is helpful in this zone to reduce fire spread and cut down on the need for maintenance and water. Due to the size and open nature of this area, firefighters are likely to take a stand here to defend your home.

## ZONE 3

Zone 3 includes natural vegetation that has been modified to reduce available fuel volumes. The width of this band extends to the limit of the defensible space required according to topography - minimally 70' but may extend out 200'. The goal is to thin out overcrowded plants, eliminate ladder fuels, and remove any dead plants or portions of plants that may spread fire.



# What is a “Hardened” Home?

The ability of your home to survive wildfire depends on its construction materials and the quality of the “defensible space” surrounding it. Embers from a wildfire 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 of the measures listed below, each will increase your home’s, and possibly your family’s, safety and survival during a wildfire.



## ROOFS

A roof is the most vulnerable surface for embers to land, lodge and start a fire; this includes roof valleys, open ends of barrel tiles, and rain gutters.

## EAVES

Embers gather under open eaves and ignite exposed wood or other combustible material.

## VENTS

Embers enter the attic or other concealed space and ignite combustible materials. Vents in eaves and cornices are particularly vulnerable, as are any un-screened vents. Install fire (heat) and ember resistant vents.

## WALLS

Combustible siding or other combustible or overlapping materials provide a surface and crevice for embers to nestle and ignite.

## WINDOWS & DOORS

Embers can enter gaps in doors, including garage doors. Plants or combustible storage near windows can be ignited from embers and generate heat that can break windows and/or melt combustible frames. Install dual pane/ tempered glass. Vinyl cladding NOT recommended.

## BALCONIES & DECKS

Embers collect in or on combustible surfaces or undersides of decks and balconies, ignite the material, and enter the home through walls or windows. To harden your home even further, consider protecting your home with a residential fire sprinkler system. In addition to extinguishing a fire started by an ember that enters your home, it also protects you and your family 24/7, year-round, from any fire that may start in your home, not just wildfire.



# Tour a Wildfire Ready Home

**Home Site and Yard:** Ensure that you have at least a 100-foot radius of defensible space (cleared vegetation) around your home. Note that even more clearance may be needed for homes in severe hazard areas. This means looking past what you own to determine the impact a common slope or neighbor's yard will have on your property during a wildfire.

Cut dry weeds and grass before noon when temperatures are cooler to reduce the chance of sparking a fire.

Landscape with fire-resistant plants with high moisture content and are low-growing.

**Hedges:** Do not use flammable vegetation for privacy screening. Non-combustible fencing or walls are much safer, have minimal maintenance and require no watering.

Keep woodpiles, propane tanks and combustible materials away from your home and other structures, such as garages, barns, and sheds.

Ensure that trees are far away from power lines.

Visit [www.montecitofire.com](http://www.montecitofire.com) for a list of plants and planting criteria.

**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.

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

**Roof:** Your roof is the most vulnerable part of your home because it can easily catch fire from wind-blown embers. Homes with wood-shake or shingle roofs are at a higher risk of being destroyed during a wildfire than homes with fire-resistant roofs.

Build your roof or re-roof with fire-resistant materials that include composition, metal or tile. Block any spaces between roof decking and covering to prevent ember intrusion.

Clear pine needles, leaves and other debris from your roof and gutters.

Cut any tree branches within ten feet of your roof.

**Vents:** Vents on homes are particularly vulnerable to flying embers.

All vent openings should be covered with 1/8-inch metal mesh. Do not use fiberglass or plastic mesh because they can melt and burn.

Attic vents in eaves or cornices should be baffled or otherwise prevent ember intrusion (mesh is not enough).

**Windows:** Heat from a wildfire can cause windows to break even before the home ignites. This allows burning embers to enter and start internal fires. Single-paned and large windows are particularly vulnerable.

Install dual-paned with the exterior pane of tempered glass windows to reduce the chance of breakage in a fire.

Limit the size and number of windows in your home that face large areas of vegetation.

Vinyl cladding is not recommended.

**Non-Combustible Fencing:** Make sure to use non-combustible fencing to protect your home during a wildfire.

**Garage:** Have a fire extinguisher and tools such as a shovel, rake, bucket, and hoe available for fire emergencies.

Install a solid door with self-closing hinges between living areas and the garage. Install weather stripping around and under the doors to prevent ember intrusion.

Store all combustibles and flammable liquids away from ignition sources.

**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 gates open inward and 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.

**Chimney:** Cover your chimney outlet and stovepipe with a non-flammable screen of 1/4-inch wire mesh or smaller to prevent embers from escaping and igniting a fire.

Make sure that your chimney is at least 10 feet away from any tree branches.

**Non-Combustible Boxed In Eaves:** Box in eaves with non-combustible materials to prevent accumulation of embers.

**Rain-gutters:** Screen or enclose rain-gutters to prevent accumulation of plant debris.

**Walls:** Wood products, such as boards, panels, or shingles are common siding materials. However, they are combustible and not good choices for fire-prone areas.

Build or remodel with fire-resistant building materials, such as brick, cement, masonry, or stucco.

Be sure to extend materials from foundation to roof.

**Deck/Patio Cover :** Use heavy timber or non-flammable construction material for decks and patio covers.

Enclose the underside of balconies and decks with fire-resistant materials to prevent embers from blowing underneath, lodging and starting a fire.

Keep your deck clear of combustible items, such as baskets, dried flower arrangements and other debris.

The decking surface must be ignition resistant if it's within 10 feet of the home.

**Water Supply:** Have multiple garden hoses that are long enough to reach any area of your home and other structures on your property.

If you have a pool or well, consider a pump.





# Get SET - Prepare your Family

## Create Your Own Wildfire Action Plan

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 prepare your Wildfire Action Plan.

Each family's plan will be different, depending on their situation.

Once you finish your plan, rehearse it regularly with your family and keep it in a safe and accessible place for quick implementation.



- ☑ 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 escape routes.
- ☑ Designate an emergency meeting location outside of the fire hazard area.
- ☑ Assemble an emergency supply kit as recommended by the American Red Cross.
- ☑ Appoint an out-of-area friend or relative as a point of contact so that you can communicate with family members who have relocated.
- ☑ Maintain a list of emergency contact numbers posted near your phone and in your emergency supply kit.
- ☑ Keep an extra emergency supply kit in your car in case you can't get to your home because of fire.
- ☑ Have a portable radio or scanner so that you can stay updated on the fire.
- ☑ Review your insurance policy — Do you have adequate coverage?
- ☑ Inventory your home—take photos and include the inside of closets, cupboards and drawers



# As the Fire Approaches

## INDOOR CHECKLIST

- ☑ Shut all windows and doors, leaving them unlocked.
- ☑ Shut off air conditioning & heating units.
- ☑ Close fireplace doors & damper.
- ☑ Remove flammable window shades and lightweight curtains and close metal shutters.
- ☑ Move flammable furniture to the center of the room, away from windows and doors.
- ☑ Leave your lights on so firefighters can see your house under smoky conditions.

## OUTDOOR CHECKLIST

- ☑ Gather up flammable items from the exterior of the house and bring them inside (e.g., patio furniture, children's toys, doormats, etc.) or place them in your pool.
- ☑ Turn off outdoor propane tanks.
- ☑ Connect garden hoses to outside taps.
- ☑ Don't leave sprinklers on or water running - they can waste critical water pressure.
- ☑ Leave exterior lights on.
- ☑ Back your car into the garage. Shut doors and roll up windows.
- ☑ Keep the garage door closed until you are ready to leave.
- ☑ Disconnect electric garage door(s) from the motor.
- ☑ Disconnect motor on automatic gates. Leave gates open & unlocked.
- ☑ Have a ladder available.
- ☑ Patrol your property and extinguish all small fires.
- ☑ Seal attic and ground vents with pre-cut plywood or commercial seals.

## ALERT FAMILY 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 kit on hand that includes necessary items, such as a battery-powered radio, spare batteries, emergency contact numbers, and ample drinking water.
- ☑ Stay tuned to your TV or Montecito Community Radio Station 1610 AM or other local radio stations for updates, or check the Montecito Fire District website at [www.montecitofire.com](http://www.montecitofire.com)
- ☑ Remain close to your house, and keep an eye on your family and pets if you did not evacuate.

## IF YOU ARE TRAPPED: SURVIVAL TIPS

- ☑ Close all exterior doors.
- ☑ Shelter away from outside walls, opposite the approaching fire.
- ☑ Patrol inside your home for spot fires and extinguish them.
- ☑ Wear long sleeves and long pants made of natural fibers such as cotton.
- ☑ 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).
- ☑ After the fire has passed, check your roof and extinguish any fires, sparks or embers.
- ☑ Check inside the attic for hidden embers.
- ☑ Patrol your property and extinguish small fires.
- ☑ If there are spot fires that you cannot extinguish yourself, call 9-1-1.



## Make a Kit

- Keep a pair of old shoes and a flashlight handy for a night evacuation.
- Keep the six “P’s” ready, in case an immediate evacuation is required:
  - People and pets
  - Papers, phone numbers, and important documents
  - Prescriptions, vitamins, and eyeglasses
  - Pictures and irreplaceable memorabilia
  - Personal computers (information on hard drive and disks)
  - “Plastic” (credit cards, ATM cards) and cash

### WHEN TO LEAVE

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Leave early enough to avoid being caught in fire, smoke, or road congestion. Don’t wait to be told by authorities to leave. In an intense wildfire, they may not have time to knock on every door. If you are advised to leave, don’t hesitate!

### WHERE TO GO

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Leave 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

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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

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Take your emergency supply kit containing your family and pet’s necessary items, such as cash, water, clothing, food, first aid kits, medications, and toys. Also, don’t forget valuables, such as your computer, photos, and important documents. Organize your family members and make arrangements for your pets.



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

# My Personal Wildfire Action Plan

During High Fire Danger days in your area, monitor your local media for information on brush fires and be ready to implement your plan. Hot, dry, and windy conditions create the perfect environment for a wildfire.

## Important Phone Numbers

Emergency: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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

Family: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Friends: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Animal Shelter: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

When to go: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Where to go: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How to get there: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What to take:  Insurance Papers     Photos     Prescriptions  
 Important Documents     Computer/Back up Disks

Who to tell (before and after): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



### MONTECITO FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

If you have an emergency, dial 911

General information (805) 969-7762

Web site: [www.montecitofire.com](http://www.montecitofire.com)

Montecito Community Radio Station 1610 AM



# READY! SET! GO!



“Having defensible space, and being prepared is part of every homeowner’s responsibility.”



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