



# UI Extension Forestry Information Series

Fire No. 17

## Are You Prepared?

*Yvonne Barkley*

**Fire in the forest!** We hear the words and look to the horizon for the tell-tale plumes of smoke. By now we know that the beautiful forests and rangelands of Idaho are environments that are dependent on wildland fires for their health and existence. But when wildfire destroys homes and threatens lives, this natural agent of renewal becomes an agent of disaster.

Living in the wildland/urban interface (WUI) comes with benefits, but also increased risks and responsibilities. Wildfire preparedness is not something you can do one year and be done with forever. – it is a yearly chore and one everyone living in the WUI should have started on by now.

### Zone 1 – the Home Ignition Zone (0 to 30 feet)

In zone 1, steps are taken to decrease and/or eliminate the ignition potential of homes and outbuildings. Particular attention is paid to non-flammable roofing and enclosing soffits and overhangs.

Yearly maintenance activities should focus on:

- Designating enclosed storage areas where flammable outdoor items, such as wicker or wooden patio furniture, cushions, door mats, window boxes and planters, garbage cans without lids, BBQ propane tanks, etc., can be stored during wildfire events.
- Parking boats, campers, and recreational vehicles in enclosed areas, or securely covering and moving them away from structures.
- Relocating firewood and any items stored under decks or overhangs during the winter months to locations 30 feet or more from structures.
- Checking screens on chimney, attic, and basement openings for holes; replace with metal screening if necessary.
- Removing debris from roofs and gutters; trimming tree branches 10-15 feet away from power lines and chimneys; pruning, mowing, raking and removing plant litter from corners, along foundations, and the landscape.
- Replacing flammable mulches with nonflammable materials such as gravel.



*Remove debris from gutters and roofs.*

Photo by Chris Schnepf, University of Idaho Extension



*Consider replacing flammable mulches with nonflammable materials such as rock or gravel.*

Photo by Yvonne Barkley, University of Idaho Extension



*A well-watered landscape is a fire-resistant landscape.*

Photo by Yvonne Barkley, University of Idaho Extension

- Making sure hoses, sprinklers and irrigation equipment, as well as back-up power for any pumps, are well maintained; back-up water sources should be clearly marked and easily accessible to firefighters.

### Zone 2 - your landscape (30 to 100 feet)

In zone 2, the home is surrounded by a greenbelt of perennials, ground-covers, and annuals planted in islands surrounded by nonflammable retaining walls and well-watered turf.

Yearly maintenance should focus on:

- Controlling weeds; many species are highly flammable.
- Maintaining a well-watered landscape; if unable to water regularly, keep grass short.
- Removing overgrowth and dry debris and pruning trees and shrubs to eliminate ladder fuel configurations.

### Zone 3 - beyond 100 feet

Zone 3 is composed of native vegetation that has been thinned. If possible, highly flammable species of trees and shrubs are removed and replaced with less fire-prone species.

Yearly maintenance should focus on:

- Maintaining emergency exits; have two ways in and out of your property in case one route is threatened.
- Ensuring entrances to your property are clearly marked with nonflammable signs and that there is no obstructing vegetation.

- Clearing vegetation 10 feet from along roadsides and driveways.

### Evacuation Preparedness

Each year, families living in WUI areas of the West should go over their wildfire evacuation preparations.

- Update phone trees and emergency numbers on all phones; make sure everyone, including children, knows who to call and where to go if they are home alone when a wildfire threatens.
- List all valuables and important documents; place them where they are easily found and accessible.
- Update arrangements for pet and livestock evacuation; contact your local veterinarian for locations to bring your pets and/or livestock.
- Emergency kits should be packed and easy to access.
- Designate a place to go. Everyone is often not at home when a wildfire threatens; it is vitally important to have a safe location to meet away from your property.

**If a wildfire threatens, DO NOT WAIT TO BE TOLD TO EVACUATE.** Gather everyone and let them know you are evacuating.

- Dress for safety; this includes socks, closed-toed shoes, long pants, long-sleeved shirts, leather gloves, a bandanna, and hat.
- Park vehicles in the direction you will escape; leave the keys in the ignition.
- Put pets in pet carriers and place in a safe, accessible location until ready to load into vehicles; load horses and other livestock into trailers and hook-up to vehicles.
- Pack your emergency kit and valuables in your vehicle; load pet carriers.
- Check with neighbors to see if they need assistance; notify others that you're leaving and where you plan to go.

**For more information** you can order a copy of *Protecting and Landscaping Homes in the Wildland/Urban Interface* from University of Idaho CALS Publications and Multimedia Catalog, by calling (208) 885-7982 or emailing them at [calspubs@uidaho.edu](mailto:calspubs@uidaho.edu) or **view an online version** at UI Extension Forestry website at [www.uidaho.edu/extension/forestry/fire](http://www.uidaho.edu/extension/forestry/fire).

---

**About the Author:** Yvonne Barkley is an Associate Extension Forester at the University of Idaho, Moscow, ID.