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WILDFIRE SEASON

MILLIONS of acres of U.S. woodland burn every year in thousands of wildfires across the nation.

Statistically, the majority of wildfires — about 85 percent — are started by humans. Many other fires are ignited by weather, with climate crisis increasing lightning strikes amid blistering heat and dry conditions.

According to FEMA, a wildfire is an unplanned fire that burns in a natural area, such as a forest, grassland or prairie. They can burn beneath or above the forest floor.

Some burn up high on trees and spread from treetop to treetop, called a “crown fire.” Those known as “running” crown fires are even more dangerous because they burn extremely hot, can change direction, and if the wind is strong, they can spread quickly.

Wildfire alerts, warnings

Understanding alerts can help you know when to prepare and when conditions may become dangerous.

FIRE WEATHER ALERTS

- **Red flag warning:** Critical fire weather conditions are occurring or expected soon (often within 24 hours).
- **Fire weather watch:** Conditions are dry and favorable for critical fire weather and could become dangerous.

NATIONAL WILDFIRE RISK LEVELS

- **Low (Green):** Fire starts are

unlikely.

- **Moderate (Blue):** Fires may occur.
- **High (Yellow):** Fires are likely.
- **Very High (Orange):** Fires start easily and spread quickly, and are difficult to control.
- **Extreme (Red):** Fires start and spread rapidly. No outdoor burning should take place.

Protect your home

Wildfires move fast, but research shows that most homes don't ignite from an unstoppable wall of flames. They ignite from embers — tiny burning pieces of wood or vegetation that can travel over a mile in the wind and land on or near your home. The good news? There are steps you can take to help your home withstand nearby flames.

The most important area to focus on is your Home Ignition Zone — your house and its 200-foot perimeter.

THE IMMEDIATE ZONE (0-5 FEET FROM YOUR HOME)

This is the most important zone. Start here. Your goal: create a clean, non-combustible buffer.

- Clear leaves, pine needles and debris from roofs and gutters.
- Repair missing or loose shingles and roof tiles.
- Screen vents with 1/8-inch metal mesh to block embers.
- Repair damaged window screens and replace broken windows.

• Remove mulch, firewood, plants, leaves and anything that can burn from around the house.

• Don't store anything under decks or porches; screen openings to prevent debris buildup.

• Keep the 5 feet closest to buildings, structures and decks clear of flammable materials. Swap mulch for gravel or crushed stone.

THE INTERMEDIATE ZONE (5-30 FEET)

This is your landscaping safety zone. The goal is to slow and reduce fire.

- Keep grass trimmed to 4 inches or shorter.
- Trim limbs off tree trunks for at least 10 feet above the ground.
- Space tree canopies at least 18 feet apart (more if on a slope).
- Make sure mature trees are 10-20 feet away from the home.
- Remove shrubs and low branches below trees to prevent fire from climbing.

• Clear plants and grass around propane tanks.

• Create fuel breaks with walkways, gravel paths, patios or driveways

THE EXTENDED ZONE (30-200 FEET)

The goal here is to interrupt the fire's path and keep flames small and on the ground.

- Remove piles of leaves, fallen branches and dead plants.

- Remove small conifer trees growing between larger mature trees.
- Clear vegetation around sheds and outbuildings.
- Leave at least 12 feet between canopy tops for trees 30 to 60 feet from the home.*
- Leave at least 6 feet between canopy tops for trees 60 to 100 feet from the home.*

During a wildfire:

- Have an evacuation plan in place for your household (including pets and livestock).
- Know the wildfire risk levels and listen to alerts for emergency updates

and instructions.

- Evacuate immediately if authorities say to do so.
- Call 911 and give your location if trapped.

After a fire, remember:

- Return home only when authorities declare it safe.
- Enter with caution; avoid standing water, which may carry an electrical charge.
- Check utilities and electrical systems. If you see downed or damaged powerlines, leave immediately and call 911.
- Look for smoldering stumps or

vegetation outdoors.

- If you suspect electrical damage, hire a qualified electrician to assess your home.
- Check roofs and attics for embers or sparks, and monitor your home every few hours for at least 24 hours.

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**Distances suggested are based on National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) guidelines. However, the spacing required could be significantly greater due to slope, tree species and other site-specific conditions.*

Sources: National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), Smokeybear.com

Off to College: Dorm room safety

SENDING a child to college is exciting — but safety matters. As college students head back to campuses nationwide, whether into residence halls, apartments or fraternities, it is important that they learn about electrical safety. Make sure your college-bound students take precautions to protect themselves from campus-related fires and shocks.

Just like any other area, a campus is prone to a variety of violations, and dorm rooms are not immune. Often-times, students innocently plug in all of the typical college devices and tools — phone, laptop, lamp, TV and other electrical devices — unaware of the potential dangers. Be sure that your student is educated on safe appliance use and precautions against electrical hazards.

According to Campus Firewatch, one of the most common causes of student residence fires is overloaded extension cords and power outlets.

“The limited number of electrical outlets in student rooms tempt many to use multiple extension cords and power strips, which can cause cords to over-heat, creating shock and fire hazards,” warns Jay Solomon, Extension Engi-

neering educator. “Student residences crammed with books, papers and bedding can allow the smallest spark to quickly become a blaze.”

Steps to reduce the risk of electrical fires in student housing include:

- Purchase and use only electrical appliances and power cords that have been tested by UL and other nationally recognized testing labs.
- Do not overload extension cords, power strips or outlets.
- Never use extension cords on a continuous basis; they serve as temporary solutions only.
- Use power strips that will shut off power automatically if there is too much current being drawn.
- Never tack or nail an electrical cord to any surface, or run cords across traffic paths, under rugs or furniture.
- Use light bulbs with the correct wattage for the lamp. Check with your campus about possible restrictions regarding the use of halogen lamps. Keep halogen lamps away from curtains, loose bedding or other fabrics.
- Keep all electrical appliances and cords safely away from bedding, curtains and other flammable material.
- Make sure outlets around sinks are

GFCI (ground-fault circuit interrupter) equipped. Test any GFCI's upon first use and monthly thereafter.

- Unplug small household appliances when not in use and all electronics when away for extended periods.

Older wiring in student housing and apartments may not be able to handle the increased electrical demand of today's college student. If use of an appliance frequently causes power to trip off, or if its power cord or the outlet feels hot, disconnect the appliance immediately and report the condition to the landlord or campus housing staff.

A fire escape plan is essential. Apartment and dorm residents should know evacuation procedures and emergency exit locations in the event of a fire.

Emphasize to students that smoke detectors should never be disabled, and fire alarms should never be ignored or taken casually as a drill. If a fire alarm sounds, residents should calmly and quickly follow the practiced procedures and immediately exit the building. Apartment and dorm doors should be closed behind to prevent fire spread.

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