

Is your home safe from wildfire?: Limit your home's ignition potential

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For on-going use

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Recent wildfires in British Columbia and California have heightened the concern about wildland/urban interface fires in communities across Ontario.

Ontario can have more than 1,200 wildfires in a given year. These fires can threaten communities and destroy homes and cottages. While those living in forested regions face a serious risk of wildfires, the following simple preventative measures limit the ignition potential of your home and reduce the risk of property loss, damage and injury.

Tip #1: Manage the vegetation around your home.

Any kind of vegetation around your home or cottage is combustible and can aid a fire in spreading from the forest to your structures. Trees, shrubs, grass, your woodpile – even fallen leaves - act as fuel to a wildfire. A good fuel free space gives firefighters a better chance to save your home from an advancing fire.

Priority Zone 1

The first 10 metres of space around your home needs to be your first priority. It is the most critical area to consider for fire prevention. Remove any shrubs, trees, fallen trees or dead branches in that space and use fire resistant plants for landscaping. Deciduous trees have low flammability rates while evergreens are much more combustible.

Keep your lawn well watered and the grass mowed short. This will help prevent a grass fire from spreading directly to the house.

Firewood should be stacked at least 10 metres away from the house and covered with a non-flammable cover. Sparks from a wildfire can land in the woodpile and a fire there will spread quickly to the house.

Remove all flammable material from within five metres of any fuel tanks on your property. If a wildfire spreads to the tank, it could explode and the area would be too dangerous for firefighters to stay.

Priority Zone 2

This priority zone extends from 10 to 30 metres. Prune trees to a height of one to two metres to inhibit the spread of fire up a tree. Reduce the number of evergreens and ensure that the tops of neighbouring trees do not touch.

Priority Zone 3

This zone extends from 30 to as far as 100 metres or more. If possible, reduce and manage potential fuel sources by removing trees, dead woody debris and thick shrubbery that might allow fire to climb up into the canopy and spread from tree top to tree top. The idea here is not to remove all combustible material but to thin the area so that fires will be of a low intensity and easier to extinguish..



Tip #2: Upgrade your home's building materials and construction techniques to lower its combustibility.

When you are building or remodelling, consider using more fire-resistant materials to increase your home's longevity. Roofing materials such as steel, asphalt, tile and ULC treated shanks are ignition-resistant, and steep steel roofs do not collect leaves or tree needles. Sparks from a wildfire landing on these types of roofs are less likely to start on fire.

Similarly, siding materials such as stucco, metal, brick, concrete, and aluminium or steel offer superior ignition-resistance and log walls are thick enough to be fire resistant for a period of time.

Large, single pane windows will not prevent radiant heat from a wildfire from igniting materials such as curtains inside the house. Double or triple glazed energy efficient glass provides insulation and reflects radiant heat. Also use non-flammable blinds inside your windows.

The eaves around your roof should be boxed in and screen should cover attic vent openings to keep sparks out of the attic. Embers can collect in open eaves and set the house on fire. Similarly, the underside of wood decks attached to the house should be enclosed. Dry grass or sparks and embers under the deck can set the house on fire.

Tip #3: Ensure your home is easily accessible to emergency workers.

Should a wildfire approach your property, damage can be limited if firefighters have easy access to your home.

If the access road to your home is not named or marked, post a sign with the name of the road in reflective letters where it can easily be seen in the dark. Similarly, post the house number in reflective numerals so it can be seen from the road.

If a fire truck can't get close enough to your house, firefighters may not be able to protect it. Keep your driveway as short and wide as possible to allow access for a fire truck.

If your driveway includes a bridge, build a bridge that is wide and strong enough to hold emergency vehicles such as fire trucks. Remove flammable vegetation from at least five metres on each side of the driveway. Flammable vegetation too close to the road will make it unsafe to travel during a wildfire.

While these tips may not prevent a wildfire from approaching your home or cottage, they will help increase the chance that your home will survive the threat of wildfire.

