

# OTHER CONSIDERATIONS IN MAKING YOUR HOME SURVIVABLE

How a house is designed, where it is built, materials used in its construction and landscape, and access to the home all influence survivability during wildfire. These recommendations will make a home much easier to defend and will improve its chances of surviving a wildfire.

## 1. CONSTRUCTION

- Build your home away from ridge tops, canyons and areas between high points on a ridge.
- Build your home at least 30 feet from your property line.
- Use fire resistant building materials.
- Enclose the underside of balconies and above-ground decks with fire resistant materials.
- Limit the size and number of windows in your home that face large areas of vegetation.
- Install only double-paned or triple-paned windows.
- Consider sprinkler systems within the house. They may prevent a house fire from spreading into the wildlands.

## 2. ROOF

- Remove dead branches hanging over your roof.
- Remove any branches within 15 feet of your chimney.
- Clean all dead leaves and needles from your roof and gutters. Install a roof that meets the fire resistance classification of "Class C" or better. Local jurisdictions may require a higher fire resistance rating. Check your county regulations or with your local fire department.
- Cover your chimney outlet and stovepipe with a nonflammable screen of one-half inch or smaller screen.

## 3. LANDSCAPE

- See "Creating an Effective Survivable Space" and "Firescape - Firewise Landscape Design."

## 4. YARD

- Stack woodpiles at least 30 feet from all structures and clean away flammable vegetation within 10 feet of woodpiles.
- Located LPG tanks (butane and propane) at least 30 feet from any structure and surround them with 10 feet of clearance.
- Remove all stacks of construction materials, pine needles, leaves, and other debris from your yard.
- Contact your local fire department to see if open burning is allowed in your area; if so, obtain a permit before burning debris.
- Where burn barrels are allowed, clean flammable materials at least 10 feet around the barrel; cover the opening with a nonflammable screen with screen no longer than one-quarter inch.

## 5. EMERGENCY WATER SUPPLY

- Maintain an emergency water supply that meets fire department standards through one of the following:
  - a community water hydrant system
  - a cooperative emergency storage tank with neighbors
  - a minimum storage supply of 2,500 gallons on your property.

- Clearly mark all emergency water sources and notify your local fire department of their existence.
- Create easy firefighter access to your closest emergency water source.
- If your water comes from a well, consider an emergency generator to operate the pump during a power failure.

## 6. ACCESS

- Identify at least two exit routes from your neighborhood.
- Construct roads that allow two way traffic.
- Design road width, grade and curves to allow access for large emergency vehicles.
- Construct driveways to allow large emergency equipment to reach your house.
- Design bridges to carry heavy emergency vehicles, including bulldozers carried on large trucks.
- Post clear road signs to show traffic restrictions such as dead-end roads, and weight and height limitations.
- Make sure dead-end roads and long driveways have turnaround areas wide enough for emergency vehicles.
- Construct turnouts along one-way roads.
- Clean flammable vegetation at least 10 feet from roads and five feet from driveways.
- Cut back overhanging tree branches above roads.
- Construct fire barriers such as greenbelts, parks, golf courses and athletic fields.
- Make sure that your street is named or numbered and a sign is visibly posted at each street intersection.
- Make sure that your street name and house number are not duplicated elsewhere in the county.
- Post your house address at the beginning of your driveway or on your house if it is easily visible from the road.

## 7. OUTSIDE

- Designate an emergency meeting place outside your home.
- Practice emergency exit drills regularly.
- Make sure that electric service lines, fuse boxes and circuit breaker panels are installed and maintained as prescribed by code.
- Contact qualified individuals to perform electrical maintenance and repairs.

## THE WOOD SHAKE AND SHINGLE ROOF HAZARD

A house can be threatened by a wildfire in three ways: direct exposure from flames, radiated heat and airborne firebrands. Of these, firebrands account for the majority of homes burned by wildfire. The most vulnerable part of a house to firebrands is the roof.

Because of its angle, the roof can catch and trap firebrands. If the roof is constructed of combustible materials, such as untreated wood shakes and shingles, the house is in jeopardy of igniting and burning.

Not only are combustible roofing materials a hazard to the structure on which they are installed, but also to other houses in the vicinity. Burning wood shakes, for example, can be lifted from the burning roof, carried blocks away and land in receptive fuel beds such as other combustible roofs.

Unfortunately for homeowners with existing combustible roofs, there are no long-term reliable measures available to reduce roof vulnerability to wildfire other than re-roofing with fire resistant materials.

