

HARD FACTS ABOUT HOW HOMES BURN

The Mendocino County Fire Safe Council works hard to teach the best and most practical ways to deal with the occurrence and impact of wildfires. To ensure this, we attend trainings, read recent research findings, and talk with scientists who are digging into these subjects.

Here are some old reminders and new things we've learned, most of them from "Assessing Wildfire Hazards in the Home Ignition Zone," a national-level course which teaches people how to determine their home's wildfire risk.

▪ Homes are much more likely to burn due to small flying embers than to contact by large flames.

- Pushed by wind, embers often get inside attic vents and ignite homes from the inside. Sometimes those fires aren't visible from outside for hours after the main fire passes.
- The single most important, and least expensive, way to save your home is to cover all its vents with metal mesh with openings of 1/8" or less.
- Gutters and roof valleys full of dead leaves and debris are major culprits for carrying fire through to sub-roofing material, which may be flammable. Keep 'em clean!
- The roof is the most vulnerable part of your home. If you have a wood shake roof, replace it as soon as you can! If it's damaged, repair it in the same time frame.
- Firefighters' rule of thumb is that if more than 1/4 of a roof is in flames, the home cannot be saved. Don't let your roof catch on fire!
- **It is safer to stay inside your home during a wildfire than to be caught in your car. Don't try to evacuate if there's a risk of not making it to safety.**
- **If you start to evacuate and see that your route is blocked, return home, shut all windows, doors, and vents, and stay inside until the fire passes.**
- Similarly, it is safer to stay in your car than to be on foot. Never try to outrun a wildfire; you won't win!

▪ Most of the people who have died in wildfires were trying to evacuate but left too late, or were caught in accidents or traffic jams.

- Even a home with wood siding can provide temporary shelter against heat and flames. How? Because it takes high sustained heat to ignite wood, as with a log in a fireplace.
- Experiments have shown that the same heat that causes second-degree burns on human skin in 5 seconds will take 27 minutes to ignite a wood wall.
- Wildfires move very quickly. Their heat is intense, but lasts only 1 or 2 minutes in one place – much less than 27.
- Large tree trunks close to a house are not a major fire hazard. Think how long it would take a green log in your woodstove to ignite!
- **Truly hazardous are little things that ignite quickly, then act as kindling to catch larger objects on fire, like weeds, leaves, twigs, unpruned bushes, doormats, and brooms.** What's true in a fireplace is true in a wildfire.
- Areas under decks and porches are vulnerable. Either remove all flammable items or screen in these areas with metal mesh 1/8" or less.
- The area within 5 feet of your foundation and walls is critical to your home's survival. Keep it free of all flammable materials except small irrigated plants.
- Dual-pane or tempered glass windows resist cracking from heat. Install these if you can. Keep flammable materials far, far away from single-pane windows, especially large ones.
- 90% of homes that ignite in wildfires burn to the ground, usually because no one saw the fires inside their attics.
- **Losing your home can cause major life disruption for a year or more – a cost insurance doesn't cover. Don't let it happen to you. Be fire safe, and live!**

For more information, visit www.firesafemendocino.org, www.firewise.org, www.extension.org/surviving_wildfire; or contact the Mendocino County Fire Safe Council, PO Box 1488, Ukiah, CA 95482, (707) 462-3662, firesafe@pacific.net.