

# **SUGGESTIONS FOR CREATING A “SAFETY ZONE” FOR USE IN A WILDFIRE EMERGENCY**

In a wildfire, everyone may not be able to evacuate the burning area. If there's only one road in and out for your home or subdivision –

- the road will probably be overloaded with traffic trying to evacuate
- numerous fire engines, water tankers, and bulldozers will be trying to enter the area
- a vehicle could stall or have an accident on the road, blocking all cars behind it
- the fire may be on both sides of the road, so no vehicles can get through

Even if you have more than one road, erratic winds may drive the fire in multiple directions, making evacuation unsafe in any direction.

In such situations, people have two choices: (1) staying at home and “sheltering in place,” which requires excellent fire safe preparation of your home and surroundings, or (2) going to a pre-designated and pre-prepared “Safety Zone.” *Safety Zones are wide, cleared, open areas where you and your neighbors could go to survive a wildfire passing through.*

Some neighborhoods may have pre-existing safety zones, such as large parking lots or large dirt horse arenas. Many people in rural areas, though, will need to create safety zones.

Fire needs three components in order to exist: heat, oxygen, and fuel. Fuel means anything that burns. In rural areas this includes grass, brush, trees, slash, homes, barns, wood piles, fences, cars, and machinery. Take away the items that fuel the fire, and the fire will not be able to burn!

Safety zones are places where the fuel has been removed, so the fire cannot burn. When a fire arrives at an area with no fuel, it will burn *around* the area, but not *through* it. The people in the middle of a good safety zone will feel the fire's heat and wind, but should not be burned by it.

The location of a safety zone is critical. It should be a flat location: for instance, a large grazed field with no trees and brush, or perhaps a wide, flat river bed with little vegetation nearby. A running creek or river can be a safe refuge IF it's not in a canyon with vegetation on the banks.

The safety zone should be as large as you can possibly make it. How big depends on the height of the nearest vegetation. Fire specialists recommend that if your safety zone is a field surrounded by trees 50 feet tall, your safety zone should be at least 450 feet (150 yards) in diameter. The reason for this large size is that burning trees put off a tremendous amount of radiant heat. The radiant heat from burning trees can catch a home on fire 100 feet away! And human skin and lungs are much more delicate than home sidings. Burning grass, on the other hand, puts off much less heat, and could require a safety zone only 60 feet in diameter. The larger your safety zone, the more protected you will be from the fire. You can increase your safety by cutting back and thinning the trees and brush that surround your safety zone, which will reduce the heat you would feel.

In order for a safety zone to be truly safe, it needs to have all or nearly all flammable materials removed from it in advance. Brush should be cut and removed, grass should be weed-whacked, and the area should be cleared as close to soil as possible. But green grass is a good thing!

Consider storing water and firefighting tools in your safety zone.

Create your safety zone in late spring, and monitor it every week during fire season to make sure it is still free of flammable materials. **BE FIRE SAFE, AND LIVE!**

**MENDOCINO COUNTY FIRE SAFE COUNCIL**

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