



Alisa Ann Ruch Burn Foundation's
Wildfire P.R.E.P.A.R.E.

California has seen the most destructive and deadly wildfires over the past recent years due to a number of reasons, including steep terrain, access limitations, changing climate conditions, and invasive species¹. California has also been experiencing recurrent drought years and drought is one stressor that has left millions of acres of dead, standing trees, leading to increased wildfire threats¹.

Wildfires are started by one of two causes: nature or humans. In nature, wildfires are started by environmental variables including vegetation and weather, and natural ignition sources (primarily lightning)¹. Human-driven wildfires are predominantly caused by campfires, smoking, fire use, incendiary, equipment, railroad, youth fire play and other miscellaneous reasons².

One-third of all homes in the United States are in the wildland-urban interface and face enhanced wildfire risk³. In 2019, 87% of wildfires were caused by humans⁴. There is clear evidence that small investments in fire prevention help reduce the high cost of wildfire damage¹. **There are ways that we as individuals, families and communities can P.R.E.P.A.R.E. for a wildfire.**

When it comes to wildfire preparedness, there are a number of great resources available from many credible agencies, including: California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), American Red Cross, International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) and US Fire Administration (USFA), among many others. AARBF's **P.R.E.P.A.R.E.** organizes the information, tips and guidance provided by these agencies and organizations into 7 easy steps on how you can **P.R.E.P.A.R.E.** for a wildfire.

Plan

Review and Rehearse

Evacuate

Prepare to Return Home

Assess and Adjust

Return Home

Evaluate



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The best way to prepare for a wildfire is to make a plan. There are several plans you should consider in preparing for a wildfire:

- **Home Safety Plan**
 - [Defensible Space](#)
 - [Hardened Home Plan](#)
 - [Fire-Resistant Landscaping Plan](#)
 - [Use Equipment Responsibly](#)
 - Be sure your house numbers show clearly from the street, both day and night.
 - Review insurance coverage to make sure it is enough to replace your property⁵.
- **Home Evacuation Plan**
 - [Home Escape Plan](#)
 - Know Two Ways Out
 - Designate an emergency meeting place outside your home
 - [Pet Evacuation Plan](#)
 - [Transportation Plan](#)
 - Evacuation Route Map with at least two routes.
- **[Emergency Supplies](#)**
 - In case of a wildfire, you want to ensure that you have your emergency supplies and essentials together in one place.
 - Whether you need to shelter in place or evacuate your home, be sure to have emergency supplies on hand and ready to go.
- **Important Documents Plan**
 - Safeguard important documents, including personal, financial, insurance, and medical records so you can start recovering right away. Keep important documents in a fireproof, safe place. Create password-protected digital copies.
 - Birth certificates, passports, Social Security cards, insurance policies, deed, mortgage, lease, loan papers. Photos of valuable belongings.
 - Current digital photos of loved ones updated every six months, especially for children.
 - List of medications, allergies, and medical equipment.
- **Community Evacuation Plan**
 - Learn the types of disasters that are likely in your community and the local emergency, evacuation and shelter plans for each specific disaster.
- [Communication Plan](#)

- Create a plan to reconnect with loved ones and to reach your support network and other emergency contacts if communication networks are down. Have a back-up battery to charge your cell phone.
- Set up a communications app such as [Signal](#).
- Complete a contact card for each member of your household, and support network, and ensure that they carry it. Designate an out-of-town contact who can help your household reconnect. Text is best. A text message may go through when a phone call won't.
- Register to receive free emergency alerts that your community offers⁶. Sign up for your community's warning system. The Emergency Alert System (EAS) and [CAL FIRE](#) also provide emergency alerts. Check [AirNow.gov](#) for information about your local air quality⁵.

Review and Rehearse

It is not enough to have a plan. You and members of your household need to review the plan(s) that you have created regularly. In addition to reviewing the plan(s), it is best to rehearse your plan(s) in order to ensure that you and every one in your household know exactly what to do in case of a wildfire.

- Practice your [Home Escape Plan](#) regularly (i.e. during Daylight Savings).
- Review and update your [Communication Plan](#) regularly to ensure that the contact information that you have is up-to-date.
- Make sure that all family members understand how to STOP, DROP AND ROLL if their clothes should catch fire
- Drive your planned route of escape before an actual emergency⁶.
- Have the right type of fire extinguishers on hand and train your family how to use them⁶.
- Ensure that your family knows where your gas, electric and water main shut-off controls are and how to use them³.

Evacuate

The authorities issue evacuation alerts, warnings and orders in order to ensure your safety and the safety of others. These alerts, warnings and orders should be taken seriously and instructions from the authorities on how to evacuate safely should be followed.

- If authorities advise you to evacuate, be prepared to leave immediately
- Always keep an eye on conditions in your area. You may not receive an evacuation order, as these systems are not perfect. Be prepared to take the initiative if you assess the need to evacuate³.
- There are three levels of Evacuation:
 - **Evacuation Alert:** A wildfire threat is in your area. It would be wise to consider planning and/or packing, in the event an evacuation becomes necessary.
 - **Evacuation Warning:** High probability of a need to evacuate. You can voluntarily evacuate.
 - Shut all windows and doors but do not lock them. Remove flammable window shades, curtains and close metal shutters.
 - Move flammable furniture to the center of the room, away from windows and doors.
 - Shut off gas at the meter; turn off pilot lights. Shut off the air conditioning.
 - Gather up flammable items from the exterior of the house and bring them inside (patio furniture, toys, trash cans, etc.).

- If you have a ladder, prop it against the house so you and firefighters have access to roof³.
- Turn off propane tanks. Move propane BBQ appliances away from structures. Don't leave sprinklers on or water running, they can affect critical water pressure.
- Detach electrical garage doors. Back your car into the driveway with vehicle loaded and all doors and windows closed.
- Turn a light on in each room for visibility in case of smoke⁶.
- Ensure your Emergency Supply Kit is in your vehicle.
- Locate your pets and prepare to take them with you. Refer to your [Pet Evacuation Plan](#). If you must leave your pets, bring them indoors. Never leave pets chained outdoors.
- **Evacuation Order:** Danger is currently affecting your area or is imminent, and you should leave immediately.
 - All evacuation instructions provided by officials should be followed immediately for your safety.
 - Leave as soon as fire officials recommend evacuation to avoid being caught in fire, smoke, or road congestion.

P prepare to Return Home

After an evacuation, you may want to think about when and how you will be able to return home. Returning home may be quick or may take some time. It is important to stay informed to understand the current conditions and what to consider when making the decision on when to return home.

- Listen to news reports for updates on the wildfire conditions
- Pay attention to emergency alerts and your community's warning system

A Assess and Adjust

While evacuated, there may be a lot of thoughts running through your mind: When can I go home? What happened to my home? What am I going to do now? Take some time to assess your current situation and possibly make adjustments to your plan to return home.

- Assess if your home is the safest place to return. If your home has been destroyed or severely damaged in the wildfire, start making plans for temporary or longer-term living arrangements.
- Assess your and your loved ones' mental wellbeing. Wildfires are traumatic events and can bring feelings of anger, sadness and fear. Check-in with yourself and others to see how you are feeling and what support is needed.
- Adjust your plan to return home accordingly. Will temporary housing or lodging be needed?

R Return Home

Once evacuation orders have been lifted and authorities have deemed it safe to return home, there are a number of considerations to keep in mind:

- Do not return home until authorities say it is safe
- Do not enter your home until fire officials say it is safe.
- Use caution when entering burned areas as hazards may still exist, including hot spots, which can flare up without warning.
- Avoid damaged or fallen power lines, poles, and downed wires.
- Watch for ash pits and mark them for safety—warn family and neighbors to keep clear of the pits also.
- Follow public health guidance on safe cleanup of fire ash and safe use of masks. Children should not do any cleanup work.
- Ensure your food and water supplies are safe.
- Discard any food that has been exposed to heat, smoke or soot.
- Do NOT ever use water that you think may be contaminated to wash dishes, brush teeth, prepare food, wash hands, make ice or make baby formula.

Evaluate

After a wildfire, there is so much damage to repair, physically, financially, emotionally, and mentally. Take the time to evaluate your property, damage, insurance coverage as well as the physical, mental, and emotional health of you and your loved ones.

- Check your emergency kit and replenish any items missing or in short supply, especially medications or medical supplies.
- Document property damage with photographs. Conduct an inventory and contact your insurance company for assistance.
- Wildfires dramatically change landscape and ground conditions, which can lead to increased risk of flooding due to heavy rains, flash flooding, and mudflows. Flood risk remains significantly higher until vegetation is restored—up to 5 years after a wildfire. Consider purchasing flood insurance to protect the life you've built and to assure financial protection from future flooding⁵.
- Evaluate your emotional health:
 - When we experience a disaster or other stressful life event, we can have a variety of reactions, which may include:
 - Feeling physically and mentally drained
 - Having difficulty making decisions or staying focused on topics
 - Becoming easily frustrated on a more frequent basis
 - Be available for family, friends, and neighbors who may need someone to talk to about their feelings. The threat of a wildfire can add additional stress. You may need to talk to someone about your feelings, too. Don't be afraid to reach out to friends, family, or professionals if you need help coping with your stress, anxiety, or sadness⁵.

Additional Resources for Wildfire Preparedness

¹*The National Strategy: The Final Phase in the Development of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy:*

<https://www.forestsandrangelands.gov/documents/strategy/strategy/CSPHaseIIINationalStrategyApr2014.pdf>

²*Wildfire Prevention Strategies:* <https://www.ready.gov/wildfires>

³American Red Cross Wildfire Safety: <https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/types-of-emergencies/wildfire.html>

⁴Smokey the Bear Only You Can Prevent Wildfires: <https://www.smokeybear.com/en>

⁵Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Wildfires: <https://www.ready.gov/wildfires>

⁶California Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) Wildfire is Coming...Are You Ready?:
<https://www.readyforwildfire.org/prevent-wildfire/equipment-use/>

Alisa Ann Ruch Burn Foundation Children & Recovery from Wildfires: <https://www.aarbf.org/print-material/children-recovery-from-wildfires/>

Alisa Ann Ruch Burn Foundation Psychological Impact of Wildfires: <https://www.aarbf.org/print-material/psychological-impact-of-wildfires-for-burn-and-trauma-survivors/>

National Fire Protection Association Wildfire: <https://www.nfpa.org/Public-Education/Fire-causes-and-risks/Wildfire>

International Association of Fire Firefighters Wildfire Safety Toolkit:
<https://www.iaff.org/toolkits/wildfire-safety/>

International Association of Fire Chiefs Are YOU Wildfire Ready?: https://www.wildlandfirersg.org/s/are-you-wildfire-ready?language=en_US

United State Fire Administration (USFA) Wildfire safety outreach materials:
<https://www.usfa.fema.gov/prevention/outreach/wildfire.html>