

Evacuation Plan is More Than You May Think

Everyone living in a wooded area should have an evacuation plan. It should be discussed periodically, and parts of it should even be rehearsed.

An evacuation plan is more than a description of how to get out of the house. A complete plan includes:

- ▲ An escape route.
- ▲ A family meeting place.
- ▲ Instructions for children.
- ▲ Steps to make your house as fireproof as possible.
- ▲ Plans for a fast getaway.
- ▲ Provisions for pets.

Generally, a family forced by wildfire to evacuate will do so together, so the escape route will be the same for all. It is important to establish a meeting place in case all family members are not home when the evacuation takes place.

Children who are home alone should have firm instructions to leave the home at the first threat of danger. They should report to the prearranged meeting place and stay there until they hear from you. Should they encounter a threatening situation upon arriving home, their instructions should be to go directly to the meeting place.

Depending on how much time you have before an approaching wildfire could likely reach your vicinity, here are some things you can do to help fireproof your home, ensure a fast getaway, and take care of pets:

Outside the House

- ▲ Place combustible items (outdoor furniture, etc.) in the garage, house or barn.
- ▲ Seal up attic and ground vents and windows (if storm shutters are not present) with precut plywood to keep out sparks.
- ▲ Connect garden hoses to outside taps; equip them with spray-gun nozzles. Have enough hose to reach any area of the house and nearby out-buildings.

- ▲ Turn off fuel supplies by closing the service valve at the tank or meter. Extinguish all pilot lights.
- ▲ Place sprinklers on the roof and near all above-ground fuel tanks or meter. DO NOT turn on the water until the fire is near in order to conserve water.
- ▲ If you have a portable gasoline-powered pump to take water from a swimming pool, tank or pond, make sure it is operational and in place.

Inside the House

- ▲ Close all windows and doors to prevent sparks from blowing inside and to prevent drafts.
- ▲ Open the damper on fireplaces to stabilize inside-outside pressure, but close fireplace screens to keep sparks from igniting the interior of the house.
- ▲ Turn on a light in each room to make the house more visible in heavy smoke.
- ▲ Close all venetian blinds and heavy drapes to keep out heat and to provide safety in case heat or wind breaks windows.
- ▲ Remove lightweight curtains to prevent them from being ignited by radiated heat.
- ▲ Move flammable furniture away from windows and sliding doors to reduce the possibility of ignition.
- ▲ Place valuable papers and memorabilia inside the car for quick departure.
- ▲ Confine pets to one room so they can be easily located.
- ▲ Back the car into the garage and roll up the windows.
- ▲ If there is an automatic garage door opener, disconnect it so you can still get the car out if a power failure occurs.
- ▲ Close all garage doors and windows.
- ▲ Keep your radio tuned to a local station for fire reports and evacuation information.

Don't Trade Safety for Seclusion

In the pursuit of privacy, many homeowners build out of sight of adjacent streets. While this is aesthetically pleasing, it can have its drawbacks. In the event of a fire or when emergency equipment is needed, valuable time can be lost if rescue personnel have to take time searching for your home.

Driveways leading to your home should be clearly marked with an address, and built to handle firefighting equipment. Eliminate sharp curves and dips, make culverts and bridges wide and strong enough to accommodate heavy equipment, prune low-hanging limbs, and provide room for trucks to turn around when they arrive at your home.

Whenever practical, build two access routes to forested homes. This safety measure could allow firefighting equipment to reach the site and occupants to be evacuated if one driveway is blocked by fire.

When firefighters arrive, it is wise to leave the task of protecting your home to the professionals. A quick briefing about such things as the location of water supplies, buried utility lines and septic tanks, and any hazardous materials you have stored will be welcomed. But after the briefing, the best way to assist the firefighters is to retreat to a safe place while they concentrate on protecting your home without having to protect you, too.

Plan Ahead!

Most of the tips offered in this pamphlet require action **before** a fire threatens your home!

Woodland Homes

FIRE SAFETY



A Partnership for the People

Florida Division of Forestry · Florida State Fire Marshal
Florida Fire Chiefs Association · Florida State Firemen's Association

Florida Fire Marshals Association

International Society of Fire Service Instructors,
Florida Chapter

Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
CHARLES H. BRONSON, Commissioner

Nestling homes into small clearings in the woods is a growing trend in Florida. But, this popular practice can be extremely dangerous when it comes to protecting a home from wildfire.

The extent of the threat was clearly demonstrated during the first half 1998 when unprecedented damage and disruption occurred all over the state. Hundreds of homes were destroyed and thousands of people forced to evacuate as fires broke out in drought-dried woodlands and grasslands in and around residential areas.

Could it Happen to Your Home?

Florida fire departments, including the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Division of Forestry, responded to 22,048 brush and wildfires from 1998-2001. That's an average of nearly 15 fires a day.

The threat to forested homes is most severe during drought periods, especially following cold weather that kills tender plants. The danger is not only to homes in the "deep woods," but also to those in the rural-urban interface once called the suburbs. Precautions are in order anywhere there is a large enough combination of trees and understorey to allow a fire to gain momentum.

This pamphlet is designed to: call attention to building and landscaping practices that can jeopardize a home's fire safety; offer ways to preserve privacy without sacrificing safety; and provide tips that family members should know in the event a wildfire threatens their home.

Gauging Fire Danger

To a large degree, weather determines fire danger.

- ▲ During prolonged drought, tender plants that can be fuel for wildfires, die and dry out.
- ▲ Cold weather, particularly during drought, speeds the dying and drying process.
- ▲ When the woods are dry, thundershowers bring only limited relief. The fuels dry again quickly and fires can occur even the next day.
- ▲ Wind also dries fuels, and it causes fires to spread.
- ▲ **Do not burn on windy days**

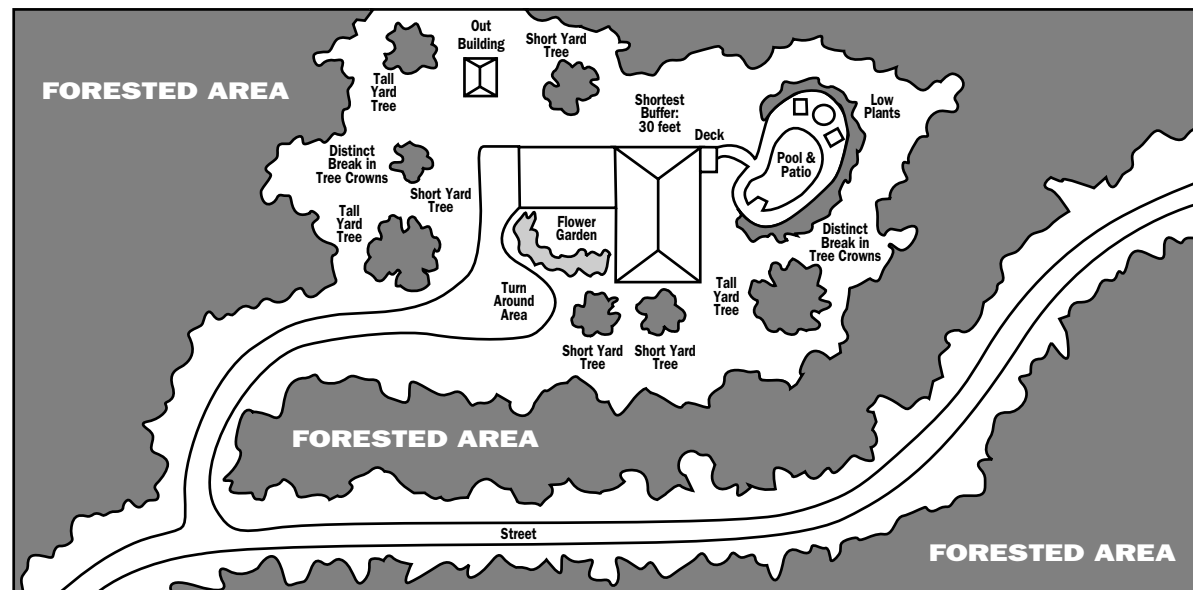
Use Landscaping to Create a Firebreak

Good grounds-keeping practices go a long way toward making homes safer from woods fires. There are three landscaping "sins" that can make a home vulnerable to wildfire regardless of the other precautions taken by the homeowner.

"Sin"	Solution
▲ Failure to have a distinct interruption of forest-type vegetation between woodlands and home.	▲ Create a buffer zone of at least 30 feet by: replacing forest underbrush (palmettos, shrubs, tall grasses, etc.) with a grass lawn; and thinning trees around the house so there is a break between the crowns of yard trees and those in the surrounding forest.
▲ Low to medium-height vegetation growing right next to home.	▲ Locate flowers, hedges, etc., away from the house.
▲ Stair-stepping" vegetation that would allow a low-burning fire to sweep up increasingly taller bushes and spread into tree tops around the house.	▲ Remove one "step" in the ladder by: pruning low tree branches; locating short plants under mature trees; and locating medium-height trees away from taller trees.

Elimination of these same hazards around out-buildings such as barns, greenhouses and sheds, and from around animal cages, pens and corrals, will make them much safer from woods fires too.

Grounds-keeping practices that all homeowners should routinely employ include keeping lawns trimmed and leaves raked, making sure the housetop and rain-gutters are free of debris such as dead limbs and leaves, and stacking firewood away from the house. Also, screens or other barriers should be used to prevent debris from blowing under the house or into the attic. Tree limbs should be pruned away from overhead power lines and the rooftop. Spark arresters should be maintained on all fireplace and wood stove chimneys.



Know Fire Laws Before You Burn

You are in violation of state law if you burn land-clearing debris or set fires for agricultural or forestry operations without first obtaining authorization from the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Division of Forestry. Some trash fires – involving leaves, yard litter, household paper, etc – must also be approved in advance. Campfires, warming fires and cooking fires do not require notification.

Land-clearing, agricultural/forestry and trash burning must be done between the hours of 9 a.m. and one hour before sunset. Setback distances from public roads and occupied buildings must be observed.

Trash fires may be illegal if pickup service is regularly available. Local laws often forbid them too. When they are legal, burning in a non-combustible container covered by a metal mesh or grill is required. However, trash fires that create a nuisance because of smoke, soot or heat must be extinguished.

Certain materials are always illegal to burn. These include tires and other rubber materials, roofing materials, plastic and creosoted lumber.

Call your local Division of Forestry office or fire department for information concerning local outdoor burning rules. Never light a fire outdoors until you are sure it is legal. And always use good judgment concerning the weather and other conditions that can influence a fire. Be safe, not sorry!

For More Information

The fire prevention "partners" listed on the cover of this pamphlet will be glad to provide additional information on the subject of living safely in the woods.

Many fire departments and agencies even offer on-site inspections and recommendations. They can also provide other materials from the "Partnership for the People" series that contain tips for making your home and family safer from fire.