

Wildfire Preparedness Checklist

A wildfire is an uncontrolled fire occurring where natural vegetation is the predominant ground cover. Though wildfires usually occur in less developed or rural areas, they can also be a threat to urban environments if the fire spreads. Wildfires can begin quickly and result from a variety of reasons, including human error, arson and lightning. Wildfires can also spread quickly, especially in drought-stricken areas. They can cause damage over a large area, and impact businesses with direct property damage, costs of suppression, and damage to personal property and natural resources. The severity of the effects are directly related to the intensity and extent of the wildfire.

The checklist below is a good start toward preparing and protecting your business and the people in your organization from the dangers resulting from a wildfire.

BEFORE THE ONSET OF A WILDFIRE

- Stock an adequate number of fire extinguishers in strategic locations, such as near loading docks and waste collection areas. Be sure that they are properly maintained.
- Train key employees and their backups on how to properly use fire extinguishers.
- Consider maintaining a water supply at your facility that will allow you to control small fires until emergency personnel can arrive. Options include installing a water tank, or installing hoses and pumps to an existing swimming pool, pond, river or lake. Be sure the hoses are long enough, and inspect them regularly.
- Establishment of defensible space (usually between 30-100 feet) around the facility to keep wildfires away from the facility and allow for fire-suppression activities.
- Consider the installation of a noncombustible (Class A-rated) roof decking and covering such as clay and concrete tile, slate, fiber-cement, or metal shingles and panels. Other Class A-rated roof assemblies are fiberglass-reinforced asphalt shingles and exterior grade, fire-retardant-treated wood shakes or shingles.
- Consider the installation of metal flashing and fire-resistant underlayment below flashing in areas on the roof that may accumulate debris.
- Think about installing gutters with noncombustible material such as aluminum, galvanized steel or copper. Also, consider the installation of leaf guards to help prevent the accumulation of debris in gutters.
- Look into the installation of fire-resistant or noncombustible exterior wall cladding.
- Consider the installation of noncombustible, corrosive-resistant metal screens on exterior vent openings.
- Think about protecting exterior-mounted equipment with enclosures constructed of fire-resistant or noncombustible materials.
- Eliminate openings resulting from exterior wall penetrations.
- Learn about the functionality of air-handling systems and how to shut off external air from coming into the building.
- If your business is located in an area subject to freezing temperatures, be sure that water outlets and pumps are properly insulated.
- Evaluate water levels in extreme hot- and cold-weather conditions.
- If your water pump uses electrical power, consider obtaining a gasoline-powered or diesel-powered pump or generator in case electricity is cut off during a fire. However, be aware of the risk that comes with storing a large quantity of fuel. Use an appropriate storage facility that is protected against vehicle impacts and fire.

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- Have appropriate tools, such as rakes, axes, saws, buckets and shovels on hand to help control small fires while waiting for emergency personnel to arrive.
- Identify and monitor local news media sources to track wildfires, and keep track of any threats to your facility and employee homes.
- Develop and communicate employee and key business-party communication plans.
- Identify and maintain a relationship with third-party smoke-remediation vendors.

DURING A WILDFIRE

- Turn on a battery-operated radio to get the most current emergency information.
- Turn interior lights on for improved visibility.
- Close all doors and windows, but do not lock them.
- Shut off gas meters, pilot lights and propane tanks. Turn on all lights in the building to increase visibility in heavy smoke.
- Switch off air-handling systems to prevent external air (smoke) from entering the building.
- If your office roof is accessible by ladder, prop a ladder against the building so you and firefighters have roof access.
- Go to a predesignated shelter area such as a safe room, basement, storm cellar or the lowest building level. If there is no basement, go to the center of an interior room on the lowest level (closet, interior hallway) away from corners, windows, doors and outside walls. Put as many walls as possible between you and the outside. Get under a sturdy table and use your arms to protect your head and neck. Do not open windows.
- Mark your position clearly with anything that may signal rescue workers to your presence inside the building. This could be articles of clothing or brightly colored material attached to the outside of your location.
- Evacuation orders will often be swift and accurate for affected areas. However, if you are unable to evacuate, stay inside and away from outside walls. Close doors, but leave them unlocked in case firefighters require quick access to your area.

AFTER A WILDFIRE

- If you were evacuated, check with local fire officials before attempting to return to your facility.
- Immediately check the facility, including the roof and surrounding property, and put out any fires, sparks or embers (if accessible). Only do this if it is safe to do so. Employee safety should be the top priority.
- If there is no power, check to make sure the main breaker is on. A fire can cause breakers to trip. If the breakers are on and power is still not available, contact the utility company.
- Always** contact 911 if any danger is perceived upon reentry, and contact local experts before finally moving back in.

Wildfires can occur almost anywhere in the United States.

Dry and windy conditions can help a wildfire become uncontrollable, causing spread of the fire and risk to urban and suburban locations. If your business is located in an area that is prone to wildfires, proper preparation and planning will help reduce the damage to your business and keep your employees safe.



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YOUR PEOPLE

- Train your employees in general fire safety, especially those involved in tasks with a high fire risk, such as welding and cutting, fueling vehicles, and working with flammable liquids.
- Teach employees about the importance of good housekeeping and grounds maintenance in preventing and controlling fires.
- Plan for how, when and where to evacuate employees if a wildfire threatens.
- Establish an evacuation plan and keep it up to date.
- Hold evacuation drills regularly so all employees know who is in charge, and so they become familiar with evacuation routes and routines.
- Make sure all employees can get out of the building, find shelter and communicate with responsible personnel.
- Plan primary and secondary exits from your buildings. Consider how employees will escape if doors or windows are blocked by an exterior fire.
- Plan two evacuation routes out of your immediate area. Think about how employees will evacuate on foot if roads are closed or impossible to use (e.g., in the event they are blocked by emergency personnel).
- Remember that ponds, lakes, rivers, landscaping or swimming pools can serve as safety zones.
- Keep appropriate emergency supplies on hand, including flashlights, battery-powered portable radios, extra batteries, first-aid kits, manual can openers, nonperishable foods and bottled water. If designated employees will be working to protect the property, have appropriate clothing available, such as work boots and gloves, personal protective equipment and fire-resistant/fire-retardant work clothes.
- If you are located in a wildfire area, consider advising employees to keep personal disaster supplies and copies of important documents at work in case they need to evacuate immediately.

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