

WILDFIRE BASICS

Wildfires can occur anywhere and can destroy homes, businesses, infrastructure, natural resources, and agriculture. *How to Prepare for a Wildfire* explains how to protect yourself and your property, and details the steps to take now so that you can act quickly when you, your home, or your business is in danger.

WHAT

A wildfire is an unplanned, unwanted fire burning in a natural area, such as a forest, grassland, or prairie. As building development expands into these areas, homes and business may be situated in or near areas susceptible to wildfires. This is called the wildland urban interface. Wildfires can damage natural resources, destroy homes, and threaten the safety of the public and the firefighters who protect forests and communities.

WHEN

Wildfires can occur at any time throughout the year, but the potential is always higher during periods with little or no rainfall, which make brush, grass, and trees dry and burn more easily. High winds can also contribute to spreading the fire. Your community may have a designated wildfire season when the risk is particularly high.

WHERE

Wildfires can occur anywhere in the country. They can start in remote wilderness areas, in national parks, or even in your backyard. Wildfires can start from natural causes, such as lightning, but most are caused by humans, either accidentally—from cigarettes, campfires, or outdoor burning—or intentionally.

IMPACT

Federal suppression costs typically range from \$1 billion to nearly \$2 billion each year.¹ The destruction caused by wildfires depends on the size of the fire, the landscape, the amount of fuel—such as trees and structures—in the path of the fire, and the direction and intensity of the wind.

- Wildfires can cause death or injury to people and animals.
- Structures may be damaged or destroyed.
- Transportation, gas, power, communications, and other services may be disrupted.
- Flying embers can set fire to buildings more than a mile away from the wildfire itself.
- Smoke can cause health issues for people, even for those far away from the fire.
- Extensive acreage can be burned, damaging watersheds and critical natural areas.
- Flash flooding and mudslides can result from fire damage to the surrounding landscape.
- Wildfires can affect the land for many years, including causing changes to the soil that increase the risk of future floods.

¹ National Interagency Fire Center, www.nifc.gov/fireInfo/fireInfo_documents/SuppCosts.pdf