

# ***Wildland Forest Fires***

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Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) areas are where wildland areas and residential areas meet and affect each other. Urban areas refer to areas containing structures such as homes, schools, recreational facilities, and transmission lines. Wildland areas refer to those areas that are not urban or in a natural state with little development. All of Park City is considered Wildland Urban Interface.

Classic WUI areas are those areas where homes press against wild land vegetation along a broad front. All of Park City and most of Summit County is considered classic wildland urban interface

## **Causes and Factors**

When discussing wildfires, it is important to remember that fires are part of a natural process needed to maintain a healthy ecosystem. Three basic elements are needed for a fire to occur: (1) a heat source, (2) oxygen, and (3) fuel. Two of the three sources are readily available in Summit County. Major ignition sources for wildfire are lightning and human causes such as arson, recreational activities, burning debris, and carelessness with fireworks. On average 65 percent of all wildfires started in Utah can be attributed to human activities. Vegetation, topography, and weather all affect wildfire behavior.

## **Wildfire Mitigation**

The following mitigation recommendations come from the Utah Living With Fire Committee. These recommendations provide a starting point to making your home "wildfire survivable".

- 1. Define and Create a "Defensible Space"**

Defensible space refers to that area between a house and the surrounding wildlands where the vegetation has been modified to reduce the wildfire threat. A defensible space can be as simple as a properly maintained backyard. When creating a "defensible space", consider the type of vegetation surrounding your home and the slope of the building lot. Houses located on sloped lots or where the natural vegetation has a tendency to dry out as the summer progresses, require a larger space. Depending on the slope and vegetation, the recommended minimum "defensible space" will vary from a 30 - foot perimeter for level lots up to a 150 - foot perimeter for sloped lots.
- 2. Break it Up**

Interrupt the layers of vegetation to provide for separation between trees and small groups of shrubs. This can be achieved through the use of nonflammable products such as crushed rock or organic mulches that help to retain ground moisture and keep flammable nuisance weeds down. Construction of hard surfaces such as patios, sidewalks, driveways, as well as rock and brick walls also help to slow the spread of flames. Keep some distance between ornamental plantings so that a fire cannot spread from adjacent native vegetation to the structure.
- 3. Eliminate Ladder Fuels**

Remove vegetation that allows a fire to move from lower growing plants to taller ones. A vertical separation of three times the height of the lower fuel layer is recommended. This

could be accomplished by removing the lower tree branches, reducing the height of the shrub, or both. The shrub could also be removed.

4. **Lean, Clean and Green**  
This concept means keeping an area free of debris by eliminating the accumulation of dead vegetation such as pine needles and leaves. Plants low growing, non - woody plants that are kept green throughout the entire fire season.
5. **Maintain Your Space**  
Keeping your defensible space effective is a continual process. Annually, review these defensible space steps and take action accordingly. An effective defensible space can be quickly diminished through neglect.
6. **Check Your Roof**  
Look for signs of debris build - up in gutters and on shingles; remove branches over the roof, under the eaves, and within 15 feet of the chimney. Install a spark arrester; check the rating of the shingles and replace with a fire proof/resistant type. Homeowners should inspect their roof twice a year to remove these easily combustible items.
7. **Construction and Building Location**  
For new home construction, the building site location is critical to reducing fire danger. Locate the building away from ridge tops, canyons, and areas between high points on the ridge. Use fire resistant building materials and enclose the underside of balconies, decks, and eaves with fire resistant materials. Consider installing a sprinkler system within the house to protect your home if you are away and to prevent a house fire causing a wildland fire.
8. **Have an Emergency Water Supply**  
In communities where there is an insufficient water supply, homeowners should provide additional personal water storage. This extra water could take the form of an above ground water tank, or even a swimming pool. Make sure to clearly mark all water supplies so that firefighters can locate the source quickly.
9. **Fireproof Your Signs and Access**  
Access to your property is important not only to get firefighting vehicles to your property, but also to allow for the safe exit of residents as visibility is reduced during periods of thick smoke. Roads must be wide enough to accommodate emergency vehicles and an alternate route of access is also recommended. If your house is not visible from the main road, make sure your address is clearly displayed on a fireproof sign at the entrance to your property.
10. **Do Emergency Planning**  
Planning in advance of an emergency just makes sense. All family members should agree on a "safe area" where they can meet should they become separated during a fire. Planning should include how to secure your residence, what to pack, how to park your car for quick escape, and other important life saving facts.

Additional wildfire mitigation information can also be found at:

[Utah Fire Info](#)

[State of Utah Division of Forestry Fire and State Lands](#)

[National Weather Service - Fire Weather](#)

[National Interagency Fire Center](#)

[Firewise](#)