



Protecting Your Home from Wildfire

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Living in the Pinelands is an enjoyable experience. The open spaces, interesting places to visit and explore, availability of fresh fruits and vegetables, abundant wildlife and unique vegetation, and the general feeling of being part of a semi-wilderness all contribute to the quality of life we have here. It is also a place where we live at risk, however, because of the frequency of forest fires that affect the region. The Pinelands is naturally fire prone, and fire has shaped the landscape over the past centuries. We live, in fact, in one of the most fire prone regions of the United States. Each year, thousands of acres of forests are lost. In 1963, close to 183,000 acres were burned in one fire consuming 186 homes and 197 buildings. Seven people lost their lives.

Adding to the fire prone nature of the Pinelands is the growing population in communities that were once wooded or "wildland." The wildland/urban interface is a term describing an area where structures or other human development meet with undeveloped wildlands or vegetative fuel. Dried leaf litter, shrubs and trees in a forested area serve as fuel for wildfires. With dry, hot, and windy weather conditions, particularly in spring and summer, those fuels can contribute to the spread of wildfire to your home. A home in a woodland setting is surrounded by fuel and at risk when a wildfire is near!

Residents of the Pinelands should take the threat of fire seriously and implement steps before a wildfire starts. To minimize the effect of fire on property and to safeguard lives, homes, and personal belongings, follow these steps:

Create and Maintain Defensible Space

Defensible space - an area that will help protect your home and provide a safety zone for firefighters. A minimum fuel break of not less than 30 feet should be established and maintained around all structures proposed for human use to provide space for fire fighting equipment in the event of an emergency. The selective removal or thinning of trees, bushes, shrubs and ground cover and the removal of dead plant material should be performed on a yearly basis maintaining the appropriate fuel break as follows:

- **In moderate fire hazard areas** a fuel break of 30 feet from any structure
(Non Pine Barrens forest and prescribed burned areas*)
- **In high fire hazard areas** a fuel break of 75 feet from any structure
(Pine Barrens forest including mature forms of pine, pine-oak, and oak-pine*)
- **In extreme high hazard areas** a fuel break of 100 feet from any structure
(Immature or dwarf forms of pine-oak or oak-pine, all classes of pine-scrub oak & pine-lowland*)

*defensible fuel break requirement as determined by vegetation classification in N.J.A.C. 7:50-6.123 and 6.124

Fire Safe Landscaping

- Plant fire resistive, low growing plants that have a low sap or resin content, and that do not accumulate dead leaves, branches or needles. Do not use rhododendron, mountain laurel, or other highly flammable evergreens as foundation plantings. Contact your local nursery to find out which fire resistive plants will grow well in your area.
- Ornamental shrubs and shade trees should be planted at least 15 feet apart, prune tree limbs to a height of 15 feet to prevent the spread of ground fire to tree tops.

Building Materials

- Construction materials that are fire resistant and non-combustible should be used.
- Consider the use of materials such as Class-A asphalt shingles, slate or clay tile, metal, or terra-cotta tiles for roof construction. Fire-resistant sub-roofs can provide added protection. Do not use cedar shake shingles!
- In place of vinyl siding which can melt, consider using fire-resistive materials such as stucco or masonry.
- Install a spark arrester on your chimney. It should be made of non-corrosive material with openings in the mesh no larger than an inch in diameter or no smaller than 3/8 of an inch.

Maintenance

- Clean roof and gutters regularly to prevent accumulation of pine needles, twigs, leaves and other flammable materials.
- Remove dead limbs adjacent to or over your house
- Make sure a five foot radius of any barbeque or propane grill is cleared of all vegetation.
- Your chimney should be inspected at least twice a year for accumulation of soot, and should be cleaned at least once per year.
- Stack firewood at least 30 feet from your home or other buildings. Keep flammable materials in safety cans.
- Screen openings in roof attic and floors to prevent accumulations of needles, leaves or other debris.

Be Prepared

- **Have the following tools handy:**

I in the event of a fire, and be sure that all family members know where they are located:

- a ladder tall enough to reach the roof;
- 100 feet of garden hose (pre-connected and racked); and
- Shovel, rake, and a bucket.

- **Develop a Water Supply:**

Develop a plan noting nearby water supply, such as creeks, lakes, rivers and ponds so firefighters can access additional water if needed. Swimming pools may also be considered in your plan. The US Forest Service and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Bureau of Forest Fire Management recommend that additional outlets be installed at least 50 feet from the house for firefighting use. Install 100 feet of pre-connected and racked garden hose to help protect all sides of the house and the roof.

- **Plan Access Road and Escape Route for better protection:**

Whenever possible, each home should have at least two different entrance and exit routes. Access roads to your property should be at 16 feet wide to accommodate fire fighting equipment, and to allow passage of vehicles during evacuation. Clearly mark all roadways and driveways. Plan a safe retreat route for you and your family before a wildfire occurs, and be sure that everyone knows the plan.

To find out more about wildfire safety and community programs, contact:

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
Division of Parks and Forest
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www.nj.gov/dep/parksandforests/fire/aboutus.html