

WILDFIRE SAFETY TIPS

September 2020

Did you know that wildfire poses a significant risk to West Tisbury in times of climate change?

More severe summer droughts, our State Forest and other large wooded properties, contribute to this risk.

Embers, combined with strong wind, are the biggest cause of house fires during a wildfire.

You can reduce the risk of embers contacting your buildings by establishing and maintaining defensible space.

Here are some things you can do to improve safety.

WITHIN 5' OF YOUR HOME

REMOVE flammable debris from spaces in and around the house.

- Clear leaves and pine needles from roofs, gutters, window wells, etc .

DRY MULCH can be highly flammable.

- Consider alternative materials such as stone within 5 feet of decks and foundation.
- Keep trees and shrubs pruned of dead and damaged branches.

SCREEN areas below decks and exterior attic and soffit vents with 1/8" wire mesh

INSPECT AND REPAIR building exterior

- Shingles or roof tiles
- Consider closing open eaves
- Seal openings around your home wherever possible

CHOOSE fire-resistant building materials

- Asphalt shingles
- Masonry

WITHIN 30' OF YOUR HOME

CLEAR away all dry brush and dead vegetation

STORE anything that can burn at least 30 ft from any structure

- Wood piles
- Construction materials
- Vehicles and boats
- Trash and recycling

CONSIDER OPTIONS for the area around your house.

Lawns, if brown from drought, are flammable.

- Keep your lawn mowed and water it if it starts to brown OR
- Reduce water use and improve fire safety by replacing grass with drought and fire-resistant plants.
- Driveways, walkways, and patios made of stone or gravel are low-maintenance, effective fuel breaks.

PRUNE tree limbs so lowest branches are 6-10 feet above the ground

- Low and overhanging branches can act as "ladders" spreading fire from the ground into tree canopies.
- For smaller trees, avoid removing more than 1/3 of the tree's branches.

EVALUATE the trees surrounding your house.

- Consider removing and replacing hazardous trees. Pitch Pines are particularly flammable.
- Consult Polly Hill Arboretum or a qualified arborist for recommendations on appropriate tree species.

PLANT trees cautiously, leaving at least 10' between building and mature canopy.

- All trees have different fire resistance. Soft woods are particularly flammable.

WITHIN 30 - 100' OF YOUR HOME

REMOVE dry brush and small conifers growing between mature trees.

- Dispose of brush at transfer station or burn it cautiously with a permit from the West Tisbury Fire Department.

CLEAR vegetation around outbuildings.

MAINTAIN Emergency Access to your home

- Keep driveways clear from obstructions (10-15 feet wide, and minimum 10 feet in height)
- Make sure fire trucks and ambulance can get into your driveway. Obstructions delay fire suppression.

CLEARLY MARK your property for easy identification—use house numbers

BE PREPARED!

PLAN FOR THE WORST

KNOW your escape route – two if possible.

ASK your Road Association to assess the road for risks and escape routes

TAKE PHOTOS of all your rooms and valuables and put them on a thumb drive

SCAN all important documents and put them on the thumb drive including- driver's license, deed to your house, your will and trust documents, proof of insurance, medical records, passports, social security cards, birth certificates, a list of personal contacts, your kids' immunization records, your pets' paperwork for vaccinations and medical history

CREATE a go-pack with essentials including

- N-95 masks to avoid smoke and chemical inhalation
- toiletries, prescriptions
- blankets or sleeping bags
- washclothes & towels
- clothes for three days
- things to entertain kids
- food, leash, carrier for pets
- Cash, ID
- one gallon of water / person / day
- non-perishable food
- The thumb drive with your house photos and documents

CREATE an Evacuation To-Do list

- List your "go bag" items, your pets, and a list of valuables you can't live without.
- List your action items, such as turning off utilities and locking up your house.
- When you need to evacuate, break out the evacuation to-do list, check off each item, and get out.

DURING A WILDFIRE EVENT

CLOSE all windows, doors, pet flaps, etc.

TURN OFF utilities

LOCK your house

GRAB your go-pack and LEAVE

Helpful Resources

MV Commission study on drought and wildfire hazards with recommendations for mitigation.

<https://www.mvcommission.org/drought-and-wildfire>

All Firewise USA resources

<https://nfpa.org/Public-Education/Fire-causes-and-risks/Wildfire/Firewise-USA>

<https://www.nfpa.org/-/media/Files/Firewise/Fact-sheets/FirewiseFactSheetsImmediateNoncombustibleZone.pdf>

FEMA site

<https://www.ready.gov/wildfires>

Plant Information

<https://www.thespruce.com/firescaping-the-most-flammable-plants-4107522>

<http://www.pollyhillarboretum.org/resources/>

"On Martha's Vineyard, between 1867 and 1929, there were 16 fires greater than 1,000 acres, the largest burning 12,000 acres from West Tisbury to Farm Neck, Ocean Heights, and Edgartown in 1916.

The last big fire was in 1965, burning 1,200 acres from Great Plains to Katama.

In 1957, a fire burned 18,000 acres from Carver to Plymouth, burning all the way to the sea. 12,500 acres, more than twice the area of Martha's Vineyard's State Forest, burned in 6 hours." - MVC study