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Are Wildfires in Your Emergency Plan? Take Charge Now.

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Photo courtesy of LAPRESS

Are You Ready for Wildfire?

By Meg McCabe, Executive Director of Programming for Fire Safe Marin

Scenes of evacuations and homes burning in the Southern California wildfires stir our concern and compassion for all those affected. It also makes us wonder about our own preparedness for wildfire. If a wildfire threatened your neighborhood, would you be ready to act?

There are practical steps you can take to protect yourself, your loved ones, and your home. While the recent rains have given us a reprieve from the dangerously dry conditions that fuel catastrophic wildfires, we know that our dry season will come and the vegetation is growing. Let's use this time to prepare for wildfire.

Develop situational awareness

Wildfires thrive on strong winds and dry vegetation. Under these conditions, even a tiny spark can explode into a fast-moving wildfire. Dry grasses and thirsty plants—common in California—become the perfect fuel to burn and produce embers. High winds can carry these embers long distances rapidly, igniting new fires where they land.

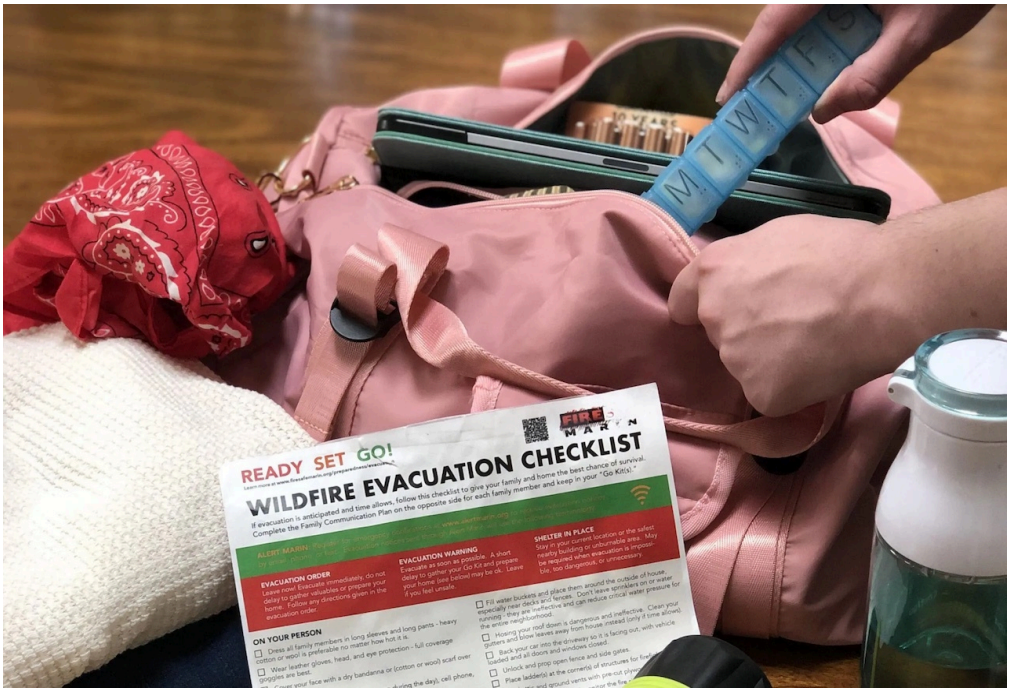
The National Weather Service issues Red Flag Warnings when high wind events are expected to last more than eight hours and the moisture content in vegetation is critically low. If we are to experience a catastrophic wildfire in Marin, it is very likely to be on a Red Flag Day. Pay attention to this warning! Be ready and check on neighbors who may need extra time or help to evacuate and encourage them to leave early if necessary.

Be ready to evacuate

Evacuation readiness begins with being informed. Sign up for emergency alerts at AlertMarin.org to receive critical notifications. Pack a go-bag with essentials such as medications, important documents, clothing, water, and eyeglasses. Don't forget to prepare a go-bag for your pets, including food, leashes, and carriers.

Create an evacuation plan and practice it with your family. Know your route out and prioritize heading downhill toward the valley floor. If you receive an evacuation order, leave immediately and stay inside your car until you reach safety. Your vehicle provides significant protection from embers and heat. Contrary to what you may see in the media, very few people have died in their cars while evacuating from wildfires.

Stay informed. Listen to emergency broadcasting on the radio (KCBS 740 AM and 106. FM and KWMR), watch for alert updates on your phone, and follow instructions from law enforcement.



Protect your home

60-90% of homes that burn during a wildfire, are ignited by burning embers that ignite spot fires in vegetation around a home or get into the house through vents and open spaces. You can lower your risks drastically by creating defensible space around your home and “hardening your home” against ember ignition. Here’s how:

- Clear all flammable materials within **5 feet** of your home and use non-combustible ground covers.
- Remove hazardous plants like juniper, Italian cypress, and bamboo—they trap embers and ignite easily.
- Break up fire pathways by spacing out plants and adding hardscape like gravel or pavers.
- Trim trees so branches don’t hang over your home and remove low branches to prevent fire spread.
- Keep leaves out of your gutters by installing gutter guards and clear leaves near your house, under decks, and around bushes.
- Choose drought-resistant, high-moisture plants that are less likely to ignite.
- Install ember-resistant vents to protect attic spaces and keep embers out.
- Enclose eaves and decks to block embers from entering.
- Replace wooden gates attached to your house with non-combustible alternatives.



A Wildfire-Adapted Community

Wildfire preparedness is a shared responsibility that Marin County takes seriously. In 2020, voters approved a tax measure to fund **Marin Wildfire**, an organization coordinating 17 member fire agencies to clear evacuation routes, manage vegetation, and evaluate homes for wildfire vulnerabilities. Marin Wildfire provides homeowners a personalized guide to help them lower the risks found on their property and grants to offset the cost of priority work.

Serving as the public outreach arm of Marin Wildfire, **Fire Safe Marin** complements these efforts by educating residents about wildfire preparation. **Marin County's Office of Emergency Services and local law enforcement** have an effective and well practiced plan to alert residents and facilitate evacuations for all emergency situations.

By working together, we can make Marin safer from wildfire. Learn more at firesafemarin.org.

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