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EXTENSION

Protect Your Home From Wildfire

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Wherever homes and structures are built in rural areas the potential for loss of life and property from wildfire exists. There are many steps individual homeowners can take to increase the likelihood that their homes will survive a wildfire. These steps are even more important for seasonal residences that are left unattended for extended periods of time. The steps involve providing adequate clearances from flammable vegetation, providing access for firefighters, and providing structural barriers against the entry of flying sparks or embers.

1. Create Fuel Breaks

The most important precaution is providing adequate clearance between any structure and the surrounding vegetation. This does not mean that your home has to sit in the center of a huge clearing. However, there should be no burnable vegetation or ground cover within 3 feet of any structure. Only widely scattered trees (preferably not coniferous trees, such as pines, spruce, or fir) should remain within 30 feet of any structure. Firefighters need that space to give them enough room to defend your home from a wildfire. Also, in many instances, that may be enough room to prevent your home from catching fire, even without firefighters present.

For the next 75 feet, or, if you have a small lot, as far out as you can, thin out any coniferous trees so their crowns don't touch. This will make it harder for a fire to travel through the crowns. Remove brush and small evergreens (less than 6 feet tall); these could allow a fire to climb into the tree tops. Prune the remaining trees to 6 - 8 feet above the ground to further keep any fire on the ground where it can be more easily controlled. If possible, mow this area. A mowed lawn makes a great fuel break. An alternative to a mowed lawn would be low-growing ground covers that are relatively nonflammable, such as periwinkle.

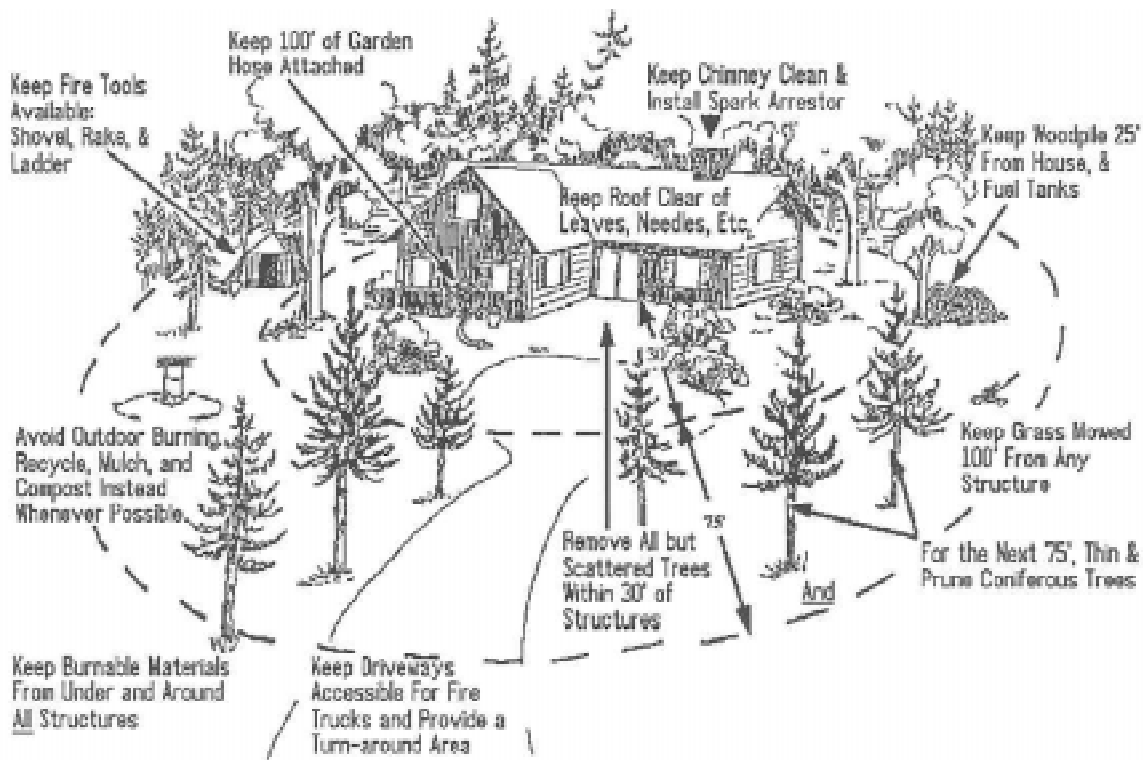
Keep dead leaves, pine needles, etc. cleaned up. Especially keep the areas under porches and decks clear of flammable debris. Many homes were lost in the 1990 Stephan Bridge Road Fire near Grayling because long, dead grass and leaves were allowed to remain right up against the structure. Some spring clean-up could have saved many of these residences.

Keep wood piles at least 25 feet from structures and fuel tanks. Once a wood pile begins burning, it is very difficult to put out. The intense heat produced is enough to start a structure on fire or cause LPG tanks to explode.

2. Provide Access for Emergency Equipment

Next, provide adequate access for firefighting equipment. Narrow two-tracks may be adequate for cars, but large firefighting equipment needs room to maneuver. Also, provide enough space for fire trucks to turn around. Firefighters won't enter an area where they could become trapped.

Think twice about a locked gate, chain, or other obstruction across your driveway. There may not be time to break it down in the event of a wildfire; firefighters might be forced to pass your home by and go on to the next one simply because they couldn't get past the gate. Place gates at least 30 ft from the road right-of-way, and hang them so they open inward, allowing an emergency vehicle to stop without blocking traffic on the road. Gates should be 2 feet wider than the driveway.



If your driveway crosses a bridge, is that bridge strong enough to support a large fire truck? If not, firefighters won't be able to get close enough to protect your home. Bridges should be able to support 40,000 lbs. To make it easier for emergency personnel to find your home, have your house number visible from the road. If your home cannot be seen from the road, have your driveway clearly marked with the house number. This saves valuable time in any emergency, not just wildfires.

3. Provide Structural Barriers Against Sparks

Finally, eliminate any openings in your home where flying sparks or embers could enter. Enclose open eaves, and use metal screening on soffit and gable vents. Use fire resistant skirting around the base of mobile homes, porches, and decks so that fire cannot get underneath.

Keep your roof clear of leaves, twigs, and pine needles so that flying sparks cannot set your roof on fire. If you burn wood, have a spark arrestor on your chimney.

Wood shakes have not been a common roofing material in Michigan, although they are becoming more popular. Wood shake roofs are very dangerous because they cannot be made fire resistant; any ember that lands on a shake roof will set it on fire. Many homes have been lost in other states simply because of wood shake roofs.

Wildfire in rural Michigan is a reality that people living there must be aware of. Steps must be taken to protect structures in rural areas **before** a fire starts.

Since his beginning in 1944, Smokey's message hasn't changed: "Remember...Only you can prevent wildfires!" With the many homes in rural areas, Smokey's message, calling people to take an active part in protecting our homes from wildfire, is as important as ever. Won't you please give him a hand?