Protecting Your Home from Wildfire

Wildfires have always been part of the Kansas landscape. As the rural population increases, so does the need to protect life and property from wildfire. While rural fire departments provide this protection to life and property, there are times that the size and behavior of a wildfire go beyond their limits and resources. Taking steps to make your home and property able to withstand wildfire may be your best protection. These steps referred to as creating “defensible space” begin inside your home and move out from there.

Defensible Space Zones.
(Refer to diagram below)

Zone 1 – Extends 30 feet from the edge of the home or any attached structure such as a deck or patio. This zone requires the most maintenance and the least amount of flammable material.

Zone 2 – Extends 75 feet beyond the edge of Zone 1. This zone contains more vegetation and flammable materials, but still needs regular maintenance activities to reduce fuel load and risk.

Zone 3 – Extends from the edge of Zone 2 to the property boundary. This zone includes the natural surroundings of your home. The vegetation closest to your home in this zone should still receive an annual “clean-up” such as mowing,
pruning, removing dead vegetation, and thinning overcrowded trees and shrubs.

Note: Fire moves faster and burns more intensely uphill. Defensible space zones that are downslope from your home need to be extended beyond the recommended distances based on slope steepness.

Additional Defensible Space Practices

• Fire-resistant roofing materials such as metal, tile, or at least Class C shingles prevent your roof from being a source of ignition from the hot embers of a wildfire.
• Windows should be at least double paneled. In case of wildfire move flammable materials such as curtains and furniture away from windows. Radiant heat can ignite these materials through windows.
• Stone, brick, or other nonflammable siding is safer than wood or vinyl siding.
• Zone 2 should have tree crowns spaced at least 10 feet from each other. All trees in Zones 1 and 2 should be pruned to a height of three times the height of surrounding vegetation (usually 6 to 10 feet), but do not remove more than one third of the live crown.
• Propane tanks, gasoline, and wood piles should be stored 30 feet from structures.
• All exterior vents should be covered with a nonflammable wire mesh ⅛ inch or smaller.
• Remove all dead vegetation from Zones 1 and 2. Especially prune any dead branches that overhang the roof or are within 15 feet of the chimney.
• If your property has no large year-round water source, consider working with neighbors or a home owners association to install one.
• Keep trees pruned and healthy in Zones 1 and 2.
• Maintain power line clearance. Have an arborist assist with existing trees that interfere with power lines. When planting new trees near power lines choose a species that has a mature height less than 25 feet.
• Make sure your address is clearly visible from the road especially in low visibility conditions.
• If you burn trash or use fire for vegetation management, consult local regulations and obtain proper training. Strictly follow all safety precautions.
• Develop a home emergency preparedness plan that includes: clearly posted emergency phone numbers, designated escape routes and meeting places, maintained fire extinguishers, and functioning smoke alarms.
• Teach children fire safety. Remember, children learn best by example!

Recommended Publications

• Ready, Set, Go Kansas Action Guide
• Prescribed Burning: Safety, L565
• Prescribed Burning: Planning and Conducting, L664

Other Sources of Information

Your local fire department
Kansas State Fire Marshal

Online
www.kansasforests.org
www.firewise.org
www.wildlandfire.org

Jason Hartman
Kansas Forest Service
2610 Clafflin Road
Manhattan, KS 66502
(785) 532-3300
www.kansasforests.org

This publication is made available in cooperation with the USDA Forest Service. The USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

Brand names appearing in this publication are for product identification purposes only. No endorsement is intended, nor is criticism implied of similar products not mentioned.

Publications from Kansas State University are available at: www.bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu

Contents of this publication may be freely reproduced for educational purposes. All other rights reserved. In each case, credit Jason Hartman, Protecting Your Home From Wildfire, Kansas State University, September 2017.

Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

MF2241 September 2017

K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, as amended. Kansas State University, County Extension Councils, Extension Districts, and United States Department of Agriculture Cooperating, John D. Floros, Director.