

Last Resort - If Trapped By A Wildland Fire, You May Need To “Shelter In Place”

Due to our long term drought and a recent dry winter, our region’s environmental conditions indicate that fire ignitions this season have the potential for extreme fire behavior. Under these conditions, fires are likely to move *faster and hotter than in previous years*.

The CODE RED system is designed to inform residents of evacuation orders by phone call/ voice message, text message and/or email. It is strongly recommended that all residents register phone numbers and an email address so that you can *hear* the information and also *read* the instructions.

Communities with a single road for access/egress, and especially communities that are also positioned high on a ridge or in the upper reaches of a canyon, can have fire approach in a way that could cut off a community from safe escape before an evacuation order can be implemented. *If your egress is blocked by the fire, law enforcement and fire personnel will not be able to come to your location to tell you what to do.*

If your egress is blocked by fire, you will need to “Shelter in Place” until the intense portion of the fire has moved past your location. You might learn that your egress is blocked by a message from the CODE RED system or an attempt by you or a neighbor to leave.

SHELTERING IN PLACE IS A LAST RESORT FOR LIFE PRESERVATION.

Here is an explanation of the concept and the basic recommendations of what to do if you must “Shelter In Place” as a last resort. Please familiarize yourself with this process and prepare the necessary materials before fire season so that you will be ready in the event that your escape is cut off by wild fire.

CONCEPTS

How an Escape Route Could Be Cutoff -A fast moving, wind-driven, high-intensity fire could burn on both sides of your access road. Extreme fires may have very high flame lengths -- could be hundreds of feet! -- and winds can swirl the flames across the road causing the road to be unsafe for egress. When approaching such a scene in a vehicle, one would not be able to tell the depth of fire or length of fire along the road ahead, so it would be better to turn around and return home than possibly be engulfed by fire in a highly burnable vehicle. ***Never try to make a run through flames not knowing how deep the fire is or what might be hidden in the flames - burned cars or downed trees across the road; you could be stranded in the most unfavorable conditions.***

How a Structure Ignites - Structures tend to ignite slowly, usually from embers drifting into small piles against the base of the structure, under decks, or against porch supports; or from embers getting under flammable roof material, such as wood shingles. Log homes and wood siding do not easily ignite from direct contact of the flame front on the exterior; think about how hard it can be to start a fire in a fireplace - you need kindling, concentrated heat and good ventilation. In a wildland fire, embers and fire brands (windblown pieces of burning pinecones, twigs, bark, etc.) that are carried out of the fire may land against a structure and pile up around the base or edges. They may ignite shrubs; if the shrubs are close to the house, this could concentrate the heat against the siding. **Before fire season, remove all shrubs in contact with or close to the structure! Rake pine needles back from any burnable parts of your home’s base including posts and supports for decks and porches. Metal roof flashing can be wrapped around post bases. These preparations can reduce your home’s potential for ignition and help make it a better shelter of last resort.**

Protection Your House Provides - Your house is a massive, insulated structure which will not ignite quickly. Inside there is a lot of air, also insulating and protective.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU NEED TO “SHELTER IN PLACE”

Preparation: Don’t panic! By reading this information, familiarizing yourself with the concepts and learning ahead of time what to do if you need to “Shelter in Place,” you will be more prepared. Make your preparations before fire season! Then, in the event of a blocked

escape route, work from the outside inward so you finish your last preparations in your safest place.

- Get your pets inside and keep them inside so you won't have to go looking for them.
- Turn off propane at the tank valve; keep the electricity on.
- Move vehicles either into the garage or away from the house - 100 feet away is best.
- Move fuels away from the house; these include barbeque propane bottles, gasoline, firewood in contact with the structure or under the deck, and flammable deck furniture.
- Set out a metal ladder to be used later to inspect the roof and douse it if the roof is burning.
- Bring a garden hose and shovel into the house to have them handy and protected for later use.
- Close all doors, interior and exterior, and all windows; open the chimney flue and have a screen in place to keep embers out of the house.
- Remove, or if removal is not possible, open all flammable curtains/drapes.
- Lower metal blinds to cover the windows. If you don't have metal blinds, space blankets can be stapled or thumb-tacked over windows to help reflect the heat back toward the fire.
- Move flammable furniture away from the windows toward the center of the room. Use a tarp (not a thin plastic paint drop cloth) to cover any easily ignitable, soft upholstered furniture to make it easier to put out embers that might land on it if embers enter the house through a broken window.
- Fill the bathtub, sinks and buckets with water; gather large pots to scoop the water into the buckets; have towels to soak - you may need to use wet towels to beat out embers.
- Keep a TV on for emergency announcements, hopefully telling you when you can escape safely.
- Wear natural fiber clothes (cotton or wool): long pants, long sleeves and leather boots or shoes for protection. Gather up a couple of cotton bandanas (or cut them from an all-cotton pillowcase) - you'll use one to cover your hair, and one to cover your nose and mouth to aid your breathing against blowing embers and smoke when you go outside; keep them dry. Have leather gloves to protect your hands. Hardware store safety glasses can shield your eyes from embers.

After the fire front: If the fire front is moving fast enough to trap you, it should pass you rapidly. It may leave many things burning around your house and down the road, so your escape route may not be safe even after the front passes. **Once the front has passed, check the structure as soon as you can do so safely.**

- Wear the bandanas and gloves when you go outside. **Look up, look down, look around** - look for branches that may fall on you, and any other hazards.
- Hook-up the hose you protected to an outside spigot; wear your gloves - the pipes may be hot.
- Look for ignitions on the roof - if any part of the roof is burning, douse it.
- Check around the base of the structure - douse places where embers are in contact with the structure, decks or porches. **Do not waste water, time or your exposure dousing trees or shrubs unless they impinge on the structure.**
- If your hose doesn't reach around the structure, use the water buckets and towels you prepared.
- Use the shovel that you protected to scrape embers away from the structure and shovel dirt on them to smother them.
- Leave as soon as you are told it is safe to get out. There are many dangers to remaining in the fire zone. **Do not stay once it is safe to get out!** If you have no way to get yourself out, call 911 and alert them that you are trapped; give them your street address.
- After the egress road is safe to use, law enforcement and/or fire personnel will check houses to escort you to a safe location outside of the fire perimeter.

“Shelter in Place” is a last resort, but it is not a death sentence. Be prepared now. Gather up what you might need now. Learn now.