

colorado REALTOR®

Knowledge Happens Here

LIKE WILDFIRE

With the threat of wildfire looming more each year, we've put together a step-by-step guide as a resource for your clients on how to protect a home from wildfire

Read more on pages 4-6

Wildfire burns during the High Park Fire in northern Colorado June 2012

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CAR SPRING BUSINESS MEETING UPDATE

Data Syndication, Third Party Aggregators and BOD Meeting

The Colorado Association REALTORS® 2014 Spring Business meetings took place earlier this month. There were lively discussions about data syndication and third party aggregators and member volunteers discussing how

to best advance your state REALTOR® association. Your Board of Directors voted on many issues this meeting ranging from governance structure to policies and procedures to a 2015 dues increase.

Continued on page 3



LIKE WILDFIRE

A step-by-step guide to show you how to mitigate a home from wildfire

Since 2000, 1,769 Colorado homes have been destroyed by wildfire. Since the 1960's, there's been more than a 250 percent increase in wildfires.¹ As REALTORS®, your clients often come to you for tips and advice associated with caring for their homes. We wanted to provide you with an easy-to-follow guide you can provide to your clients if they have questions on how to protect their homes.

As destructive as they may seem, wildfires are an essential, natural process, and nature's way of clearing out dead vegetation and brush to make way for new growth. Since people began settling along the Front Range, this natural process has been suppressed. "This elimination of natural disturbance created a dense load of hazardous fuels that were no longer being burned away every few fire seasons. This suppression, ironically, increased the possibility of a major wildfire," Says the Jefferson County Conservation District.²

A large percentage of Coloradans live in what's called the wild land-urban interface (WUI) and are at risk. If you live in the mountains, foothills, Western Slope or Front Range areas that border natural habitat, it's not a matter of *IF* a wildfire will impact your home, but *when*. Approximately 42 percent of homes in Vail are considered at "high" risk for wildfire damage, according to a report released by the Vail Fire Department. Do we have your attention yet? ⁵

"Many individuals move into these picturesque landscapes with urban expectations. They may not recognize wildfire hazards or might assume that the fire department will be able to save their home if a wildfire threatens," Says the National Wildfire Coordinating Group. ³

While we still aren't sure what's in store for us for the 2014 wildfire season, NOW is the time to prepare and mitigate your home against the risk of wildfire.

The Science Behind it

Three factors determine wildfire behavior: fuel, weather, and typography. Obviously, we cannot control weather or typography, but we can control any fuel an encroaching fire has access to. Fuel includes vegetation such as trees, shrubbery and grass; near homes, fuels also include propane tanks, wood piles, garages, sheds, decks, and even homes themselves. ⁴

When fuel is plentiful, a fire can be uncontrollable and wildly destructive. But when fuels are limited, a fire cannot build momentum or intensity, making it easier to control and suppress. The more dense and uninterrupted the fuel sources, the bigger the threat they pose to your home. ⁴

Two factors determine a home's likelihood to survive a wildfire: the defensible space around the house and the house's ignitability. These two factors create what experts call the Home Ignition Zone. To protect a home, experts instruct us on how to reduce or eliminate fuels and ignition sources within the HIZ to create what is called a defensible space. ⁴

Defensible Space

Defensible space is the area around a home that has been groomed to reduce fire hazard. This means trees close to a home are removed, grass kept mowed, vegetation is kept away from the perimeter of the home, firewood kept away from the sides of the home, dead trees, plants and needles



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are removed from the property, and large groupings of trees on the outskirts of a property are thinned to reduce spread of fire. ⁴

Firefighters are trained to protect structures only when the situation is relatively safe for them to do so. We have all seen what impact this had on homes saved in recent fires. Homes tucked away in dense forests are often lost, whereas the homes that have been maintained with defensible space can be spared. Fire departments use a process called “structural triage” to determine if it is safe to defend a home from a wildfire. The presence or absence of this defensible space is the determining factor used to determine if firefighters choose to try and save a home. ⁴

Maintaining defensible space is not a one-time effort, rather, it requires ongoing maintenance. Defensible space management is broken up into three zones

Zone 1 (A minimum of 30 feet from your home) is the area closest to the home and other structures such as garages and sheds. The distance should be increased by at least 5 feet or more for areas downhill from a structure, as it is important to note that wildfires burn up slope faster and more intensely than along flat ground. Zone 1 mitigation steps: ^{3 4}

- Plant nothing within the first 5 feet of the house and deck.
- Maintain any plants in this zone to prevent excessive

growth. Remove all dead branches, stems and leaves.

- Irrigate and water all grass and vegetation during growing season. Keep wild grass mowed to a height of 6 inches or less.
- Do not store firewood anywhere in this zone.
- Do not use areas under decks for storage
- Ideally, remove all trees from Zone 1. If you do decide

to keep any trees, remove branches that overhang or touch the roof, and consider the tree itself part of the structure and extend the distance of the defensible space accordingly.

- Remove pine needles, downed trees, wood chips and other debris.

Zone 2 (30-100 feet from your home) is the transitional area of fuel reduction between

Zones 1 and 3. This zone is designed to decrease the intensity of fire approaching a home. Zone 2 mitigation steps: ^{3 4}

- Remove stressed, diseased, dead or dying trees.
- Thin/remove enough trees and shrubs to create 10 feet between the widest point of each tree (or the crown). Dense forests promote extremely hot, fast-burning fires.
- Remove all fuels under remaining trees. Prune remaining tree branches off the trunk to a height of 10 feet from the ground or 1/3 the height of the tree, whichever is less.
- If your driveway extends more than 100 feet from your home, thin trees with a 30 foot cushion along both sides



Photo used by permission from the National Fire Protection Association Firewise Communities Program.

of the driveway all the way to the main road. Remaining trees should also be 10 feet from each other at the crown.

Zone 3 (100+ feet from your home) is the area farthest from the home. It extends from Zone 2 to the edge of your property. In high hazard conditions such as dense forests or areas with fallen trees or dead, dry brush, this area should be thinned out as well, though less space is required than in Zone 2. Remove dead trees, grasses, and pine needles. Thin trees to remove small trees growing between taller trees and reduce density of tall trees so that canopies are not touching to reduce the probability of a high-intensity fire. ⁴

Construction Considerations

As you might imagine, the building and landscaping materials you choose make a big impact on the overall ignitability of a home. ⁴

Your roof, due to its surface area and likelihood to catch hot embers, plays a huge role. Use of fire-resistant roofing materials is key. Roofing material with a Class A, B or C rating, such as asphalt shingles, metal sheets and shingles, tile, clay, concrete and slate shingles are all recommended for fire-resistance. ³

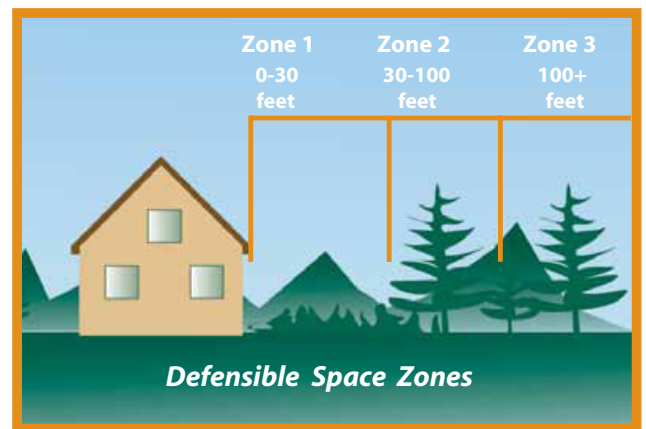
Decks are highly combustible and are often ways in which fire spreads to a house. Keep all vegetation and brush away from decks and don't store anything near or under a deck.

Windows are often the weakest part of a home. They often fail before the building ignites, giving hot embers direct access to a home's interior. Tempered, double paned windows have a higher heat tolerance and can help reduce risk by providing another layer of protection.

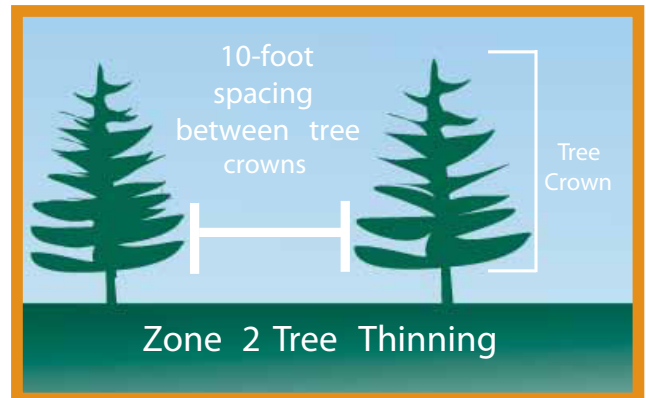
Eaves, fascias, soffits, and vents should be boxed or enclosed with metal screens to keep embers from entering these closed spaces.

Keep yourself informed

Boulder County Wildfire Mitigation and Colorado State Forest Service provide an impressive amount of resources to arm homeowners with the information they need to protect their homes. Visit [Boulder County's page here](#) and [Colorado State Forest Service Guide here](#) for more thorough and detailed information than was provided here.



Defensible space management zones. Credit: CSFS



In Zone 2, make sure there is at least a 10-foot spacing between tree crowns. Credit: CSFS



Pruning trees will help prevent a wildfire from climbing from the ground to the tree crowns. Credit: CSFS

Sources:

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