

Be Firewise: A Guide for Homeowners in the Wildland Urban Interface

Each year more and more people move into previously uninhabited, forested areas in Lincoln County. Longer response times, limited water sources, difficult terrain and unpaved roads all increase the risk of fire damage to your home and property.

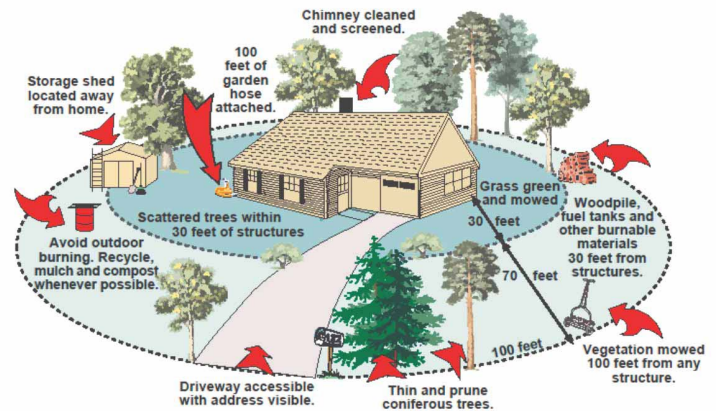
It is important that forest owners take responsible actions to create a defensible space zone around their home and outbuildings. “Defensible space” is an area around a structure where fuels and vegetation are treated, cleared or reduced to slow the spread of wildfire towards the structure. Your house is more likely to withstand a wildfire if grasses, brush, trees and other common forest fuels are managed to reduce a fire’s intensity. Defensible space provides room for firefighters to do their jobs.

Two factors are important to consider in the ability of a home to survive wildfire. These elements are the homes building materials and the quality of “defensible space” surrounding it.

Your Home: The best protection against losing your home to wildfire can be found in the building materials used in construction. The materials used, whether building, remodeling or retrofitting can make the difference in how well your home withstands both the potential “direct threat” of flames and the “indirect threat” of flying embers.

- Roofing materials should use fire-resistive materials (Class C or better rating), not wood or shake shingles.
- Inspect chimneys once a year and clean them at least twice a year. Equip chimneys and stovepipes with an approved spark arrester. Remember to regularly clean the roof and gutters that may accumulate debris from the surrounding trees.
- Enclose the undersides of decks and porches, eaves, soffits and fascia.
- Make sure roof eaves and vents are screened or enclosed to prevent embers from entering these spaces.

Your Landscape: Creating an effective defensible space involves developing a series of concentric zones, with increasing fuels management in zones closest to structures. Develop defensible space around each building on your property. Include detached garages, storage buildings, barns and other structures in your plan.



Creating defensible spaces around structures help protect from wildfires.

Defensible Space Management Zones:

Intensive Zone is the area of maximum fuel modification and treatment. The area immediately adjacent to your house is particularly important in terms of effective survivable space. It consists of an area of at least 30 feet around your house that is **Lean, Clean and Green Zone**.

- **Lean** - small amounts of flammable vegetation.
- **Clean** - no accumulation of dead vegetation or flammable debris.
- **Green** – plants are healthy and green during the fire season.

In the intensive zone, keep grasses well watered and keep them mowed to at least 3 inches in height. Also use fire resistant planting materials.

Extensive Zone is an area of fuel reduction. This zone is between 30 and 100 feet (or more) from the structure. The size of the zone depends on the slope of the ground where the structure is built. On steep slopes with heavy accumulations of vegetation and dense trees, the defensible space can extend out to 200 feet or more from the structure.

- Thin trees and large shrubs so there is at least 10 feet between crowns. On steep slopes allow more distance between crowns.
- Remove all ladder fuels from under remaining trees. Carefully prune trees to a height of at least 10 feet. For small trees, prune the lower limbs to allow a minimum one-third live crown ratio. Be sure to extend thinning along either side of your driveway all the way to your main access road.
- Mow grasses as needed through the summer. This is extremely important late in summer when grasses dry out.

General Management Zone is of no specific size. It extends from the edge of your defensible space to your property lines. It is an area of traditional forest management where the emphasis of the other forest management objectives can be applied. Forest management activities should not only address immediate fire risk, but should also integrate your other forest management objectives such as wildlife habitat, recreation, aesthetics or timber productivity.

Reducing canopy density, reducing the amount of fine fuels and tinder and favoring fire resilient species such as Ponderosa Pine or Western Larch is a wise choice to creating a fire resilient forest. Ponderosa Pine and Larch have thick bark that protects the cambium layer from being scorched by fire and they also self prune their lower limbs reducing ladder fuels which can carry fire into the tree crown. These trees are also much more likely to survive a wildfire than other conifer species.

Maintenance: Your home is located in a forest that is dynamic, always changing. Trees and shrubs continue to grow, plants die or are damaged, new plants begin to grow and plants drop their leaves and needles. Like other parts of your home, defensible space requires maintenance. Use the following checklist each year to determine if additional work or maintenance is necessary.

Defensible Space and Fire Wise Annual Checklist

- Trees and shrubs are properly thinned and pruned within the defensible space. Slash from the thinning is disposed of.
- Roof and gutters are clear of debris.

- Branches overhanging the roof and chimney are removed.
- Chimney screens are in place and in good condition.
- Grass and weeds are mowed to a low height.
- An outdoor water supply is available, complete with a hose and nozzle that can reach all parts of the house.
- Fire extinguishers are checked and in working condition.
- The driveway is wide enough. The clearance of trees and branches is adequate for fire and emergency equipment. (Check with your local fire department.)
- Road signs, your name and house number are posted and easily visible.
- There is an easily accessible tool storage area with rakes, hoes, axes and shovels for use in case of fire.
- You have practiced family fire drills and your fire evacuation plan.
- Your escape routes, meeting points and other details are known and understood by all family members.
- Attic, roof, eaves and foundation vents are screened and in good condition. Stilt foundations and decks are enclosed, screened or walled up.
- Trash and debris accumulations are removed from the defensible space.

Fire Wise Assistance: A Fire Wise Home evaluation may be obtained by contacting your local volunteer fire department, Montana DNRC Forestry Office, by contacting your local USFS District Office, the Lincoln County Fire Safe Council at (406) 293-2847 or go to www.firesafemt.com.