

Protecting Your Home from Wildfire

Rachael Brooke
Phillips-Rooks District Extension Agent
Agriculture and Natural Resources

Wildfires have always been part of the Kansas landscape. While rural fire departments provide protection to rural life and property, recent years have increasingly seen fires that exceed the ability of even the best fire departments to control fires, quickly creating a situation where fire-fighters simply cannot defend every threatened structure. Additionally, these fires are threatening properties within cities as well, so it is no longer solely a rural concern.

These steps referred to as creating “defensible space” begin inside your home and move out from there.

Defensible Space Zones

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 paned. 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. Keep trees pruned and healthy in Zones 1 and 2.
- Propane tanks, gasoline, and wood piles should be stored 30 feet from structures.
- All exterior vents should be covered with a nonflammable wire mesh 1/8 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.
- 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 from both directions, 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!

For more information, please contact the local K-State Research and Extension Office.
K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer.