**DNR Firewise program helps rural homeowners reduce wildland fire risks**

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Seven out of 10 structures destroyed by wildfire are ignited by the embers that land on the property and start small fires that find a suitable fuel bed (woodpile under deck, pine needles in gutters, tall grass in yard) that ignites a portion of a home or cabin.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources’ Firewise program provides tips to rural homeowners to reduce the risks of wildfires to their homes and cabins. Property owners who reduce the likelihood that an ember finds a suitable fuel bed, can significantly reduce the likelihood that their home or cabin will ignite.

The Firewise program identifies four factors homeowners can control that affect whether a home will survive a wildfire - access, site, structure and burning practices.

**Access**

Access affects how easily firefighters and emergency vehicles can find and access a home. Without good access and escape routes, firefighters will not endanger themselves to save a home.

**Defensible zone**

Creating a 100-foot “[defensible zone](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/firewise/livingwithfire/space.html)” around your home or cabin, especially the 30 feet surrounding it, is critical to its chance of surviving a wildfire.

Anything flammable, including firewood piles and accumulated leaf and needle fall around foundations and decks should be removed.

Firewood or other combustible materials should not be stored in the zone. Decks within 5 feet of the ground should be enclosed with metal screening or sheeting. The area under decks, unless completely enclosed with metal screening, should not be used for storage.

A 10-foot minimum space should be maintained between evergreen tree crowns, and the tree crowns and home. This prevents fire from jumping tree to tree and tree to home.

Grass, leaves and branches provide a ladder for fuel to climb from ground to tree crown. These fuels can be eliminated by mowing tall grass, trimming shrubs and pruning the lower tree branches up 6 to 10 feet, or one-third of the tree height. Lawns should be kept green and mowed short to prevent fire from carrying to other areas.

Reducing fuels in the wooded area within the 100-foot zone and beyond will reduce the intensity of an approaching wildfire. Trees should be thinned/removed to increase their spacing, underbrush reduced and remaining trees pruned up 6 to 10 feet or one-third of the tree height. This will reduce the fuels and lessen the wildfire intensity.

## Structure

Home modifications that further reduce wildfire risk include re-siding with brick, stone, stucco or steel, replacing shake roofing with class A shingles or steel, and enclosing foundations, decks and overhangs with steel, masonry or less expensive flame-resistant sheeting.

## Burning Practices

The number one cause of wildfires in Minnesota is escaped debris burning fires. If you burn leaves and debris, consider alternatives like composting. Recreational fires should be located in a fire-safe pit or container and completely extinguished before left unattended.

For more information, visit [mndnr.gov/firewise](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/firewise).

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