In the Event of a Wildfire

Wildfires in Wisconsin are very fast moving and conditions change rapidly. You may only have advance notification of a few minutes to an hour or two at most that you need to evacuate. Therefore it is imperative that you prepare in advance.

- Decide what you would take with you in case you must evacuate. At a minimum, identify these items so you know where they are and can grab them quickly.

REMEMBER THE 4Ps:

- PAPERS – important personal documents regarding home ownership, insurance, birth records, wills, credit cards, cash, etc.
- PRESCRIPTIONS – all medications you will need for several days, medical/dental/vision records and the names and telephone numbers of your family's physicians.
- PICTURES – family photos, albums or videos.
- PETS – include food and water, any medications, leash, and consider putting them in cages (animals panic too!).

- If your home is supplied with gas, know where the main exterior shut off is and how to turn it off.

Keep 100 feet of garden hose hooked to a faucet. Attach a sprayer and keep a sprinkler close by. You may want to do this on more than one side of your home!

prepare

If you are aware that a wildfire is in the vicinity and are not in immediate danger, prepare for the worst case and consider doing the following:

- Collect up those important personal items and place them in your vehicle with the vehicle parked outside your garage facing your exit.
- Remove flammable deck furniture.
- Put ladders up against the roof (non-flammable ones).
- Close all windows and shutters. Remove flammable curtains.
- Leave power and outside lights on.
- Turn on your garden hoses, with sprinklers attached. The idea is to saturate all around the base of your home and adjoining yard as best you can.
- Be prepared early, so you can leave at a moments notice. Conditions can change rapidly. Leave promptly when asked or directed to evacuate, or if you are in doubt about your safety. Evacuation delays have cost people their lives.

IF YOU HAVE TO EVACUATE:

- Leave your house/cabin unlocked with a note inside of who evacuated, where you are heading, and the time and date.
- Turn off any gas lines to your home.
- Leave those sprinklers on and evacuate to safety.
- Drive with your headlights on.

WISCONSIN DEPT. OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Firewise WISCONSIN

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Wildfire

THE NEXT STORM

RECENT STORMS LEFT US ONE MORE PROBLEM...

Northwest Wisconsin was hit by a windstorm on July 1, 2011, causing widespread damage to personal property and leaving tons of trees and debris on the ground. As this accumulation of tree debris dries out and decays, it becomes fuel for future wildfires.

The Fire Environment

The fire environment includes many factors that affect the way a fire starts and behaves. In Wisconsin, the main components of the fire environment are weather, available fuels, and human behavior. These components affect the likelihood of a fire start, speed and direction the fire will travel, intensity of which a wildfire burns, and the ability to control and extinguish a wildfire. Although weather cannot be changed, fuels and human behavior can be modified. Consequently, many of our opportunities in reducing wildfire threat lie in proper management and manipulation of wildland vegetation, and in changing our behavior.

Available Fuels

Fuel is required for any fire to burn. With regards to wildfire, fuels consist of living vegetation (especially grass and evergreen trees and shrubs) and dead plant material (dead trees, fallen branches, cured grass, and dropped leaves and pine needles). Houses, vehicles, and other man-made objects can be thought of as "urban" fuels that can also burn during a wildfire. Altering the vegetation around the home and minimizing urban fuels around structures can keep a wildfire from reaching and destroying a home.

Weather

Weather influences the dryness of the fuels that burn in a wildfire. In the spring, from the time of snowmelt until the vegetation "greens up," the risk of wildfire is often higher since dead grass and leaves can easily burn. Later in the year, hot summer weather can dry out vegetation and increase the risk of wildfires. The combination of dry fuels, warm temperatures, and windy weather create prime conditions for wildfires. These conditions make ignition easier, allow fuels to burn more rapidly, and increase fire intensity. High wind speeds, in particular, can transform a small, easily control-able fire into a catastrophic event in a matter of minutes.

Homes, vehicles, and other possessions can become fuel for wildfires.

Dry fuels, warm temperatures, and windy weather create prime conditions for wildfires.

Human Behavior

When people are living in fire–prone environments, the human built environment becomes an important factor in predicting the loss of life and property. Narrow or sandy roads and driveways, limited access, lack of Firewise landscaping, inadequate water supplies, and poorly planned subdivisions are examples of increased risk to people living with the threat of wildfire. The risk of wildfire increases when people use fire in a wildland environment. Instead of burning household garbage and yard waste, think of alternatives such as composting or chipping. Keeping campfires and warming fires small and contained will also help reduce the risk of wildfire.

Power Line Hazards

Trees and power lines can be a hazardous combination.

Power utilities and electric cooperatives have over forty thousand miles of right-of-way in the state; many of those miles run through forested areas where the utility keeps a clear right-of-way. A few utilities own some of their right-of-way, but the vast majority hold some sort of easement for their lines to cross other property. These easements vary from just a ten foot wide swath cut across the landscape to a strip several hundred feet wide for high tension transmission lines.

Clear right-of-ways are needed to help ensure reliability of your electric service and also to allow line crews to get in to do work on the line. It is to the mutual benefit of the utilities and the public that power line rights-of-way be maintained to prevent both power outages and wildfires.

Trees cause about 30 percent of all electric service interruptions. Many of these interruptions are attributed to standing dead trees and dead tops and limbs in live trees that come in contact with the line. Dead trees and limbs are simple to identify and should be removed if there is line-crossing potential.

Trees outside the right-of-way may need to be removed if they are dead, dying, or diseased and in danger of falling onto the power line. Defective and diseased trees or limbs can fall and cause broken conductors or short circuits on power lines. This may lead to a wildfire that risks the safety of people living near the power line and those who put the fire out.

Many things can cause a tree to become hazards. Wounds can be caused by storms, animals, insects, lightning strikes, frost cracks, and damage during construction or tree harvest operations. Tree wounds can lead to the death of limbs or the entire tree. Leaning trees may become a hazard if the lean is extreme, caused by wind, saturated soils, or root rot. These types of leans often have a hump or soil mound at the base of the tree where the roots are being lifted out of the soil.

If you know of a tree that could be a hazard, call your local power company or electric cooperative. Call before you cut down trees or tree limbs near electric lines. Touching a tree limb in contact with an electric line is extremely hazardous and life-threatening.

Let's work together to prevent forest fires and ensure safety around power lines.

While the majority of rights-of-way in storm damaged areas were cleaned up in 2011, more hazard trees and branches are expected to be revealed this spring. Power line companies and electric cooperatives in the area are asking for your help by not placing brush piles beneath or near overhead power lines.

Storm Recovery Website

For information on recovery options and what you can do to prevent wildfires, go to **dnr.wi.gov** and search "storm."

Wildfire THE NEXT STORM

The Fire Department Will Save My House, Right?

Some people incorrectly assume that a fire engine will be parked in their driveway and firefighters will be actively defending their home if a wildfire approaches. During a bad fire day when a major wildfire is burning or when several smaller fires are occurring at the same time, it is unlikely there will be enough firefighting resources available to defend every home. In these instances, firefighters will likely select homes they can safely and effectively protect.

Even with adequate resources, some wildfires may be so intense that there is little firefighters can do until the fire passes. The key to prevent homes from burning is to reduce the fuel available to a fire as it approaches the home. This can be accomplished by reducing the amount of flammable vegetation surrounding a home. Consequently, the most important person in protecting a house from wildfire is not a firefighter, but the property owner. And it's the action taken by the owner before the wildfire occurs that is critical.

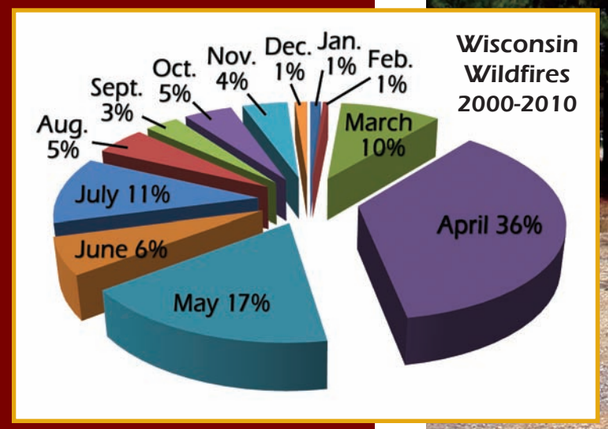
If a fire engine is available to assist in protecting your home, it is imperative that they are able to find your home, have adequate access, and can quickly exit when they need to. What can you do? First, ensure that your home has an easily visible fire number at the end of the driveway. If your driveway is long or serves multiple residences, additional signs may help define access to homes. Next, look at your driveway. To allow for emergency vehicle passage, it should have a firmly packed surface, be wide enough to accommodate a large fire engine, and have adequate overhead clearance. Long driveways and driveways with sharp curves may need to be even wider. Tree branches and other plant vegetation above and along driveways should be trimmed back on a regular basis. Trucks will also need room to turn around once they arrive at your home.

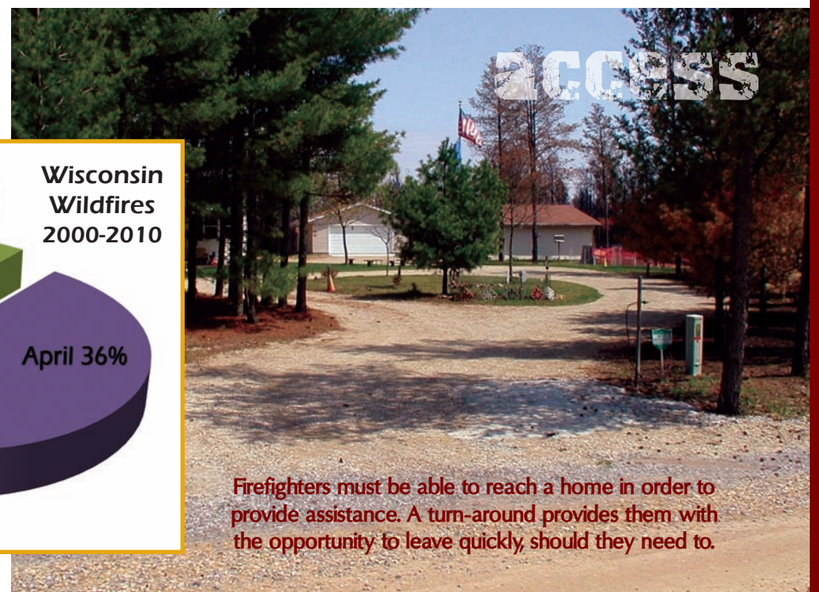
A locked gate could delay an emergency response to your property or could altogether prevent your home from receiving protection in the event of wildfire. Emergency responders may not have enough time to force entry or cut through locked gates when multiple homes are threatened by a rapidly spreading wildfire.

Check local ordinances for specific requirements regarding emergency vehicle access.

Fast Fact: When do Wildfires Occur?

In Wisconsin, most wildfires occur in April and May, after the snow is gone and before plants have greened up. Wildfire danger also increases with warmer temperatures, lower humidity, and windy days. However, as this chart indicates, wildfires can occur any time of the year when the ground is not snow-covered. Storm debris, ash disposal, fireworks, and disregard for burning permit restrictions can make the problem worse.





Firefighters must be able to reach a home in order to provide assistance. A turn-around provides them with the opportunity to leave quickly, should they need to.

On Any Given Weekend

Simple Things You Can Do to Help Your Home Become "Firewise"

Improving your home's chance of surviving a wildfire can seem like an overwhelming task – one that you may feel is impossible to achieve. Not necessarily so! Research shows that flying embers (firebrands) and creeping surface fire are significant contributors to the loss of homes to wildfires…sometimes hours after the fire has passed. To begin making your home and property "Firewise," start with the structures on your property and move out as time allows. Keep in mind that anything **attached** to a structure (deck, fence, overhang, etc) is **part** of the structure.

Clean pine needles, leaves and branches off roofs and out of rain gutters.

Remove tree branches that extend over your roof.

Clean out all areas that tend to be natural traps for leaves, pine needles and embers from a fire such as on and under decks, window wells and next to foundations.

Remove all flammable materials within the first 3 to 5 feet around structures. Fill in this area with something completely non-flammable, such as decorative stone or gravel.

Evergreens are especially flammable; remove any trees necessary to keep at least 15 feet between the branches from tree to tree within 30 feet of buildings. Lower branches should be pruned up 6 to 10 feet from the ground.

Keep flammables like lumber and firewood at least 30 feet from buildings. Embers have been known to smolder in firewood stacks and catch fire long after the fire itself has passed.

Create a 10-foot clearance around your propane tank. Keep grass mowed short or fill in the area with rocks or gravel.

Remove all dead branches, trees and shrubs within 100 feet of your home.

Keep trees and shrubs well-spaced in the area 30 to 100 feet around buildings; thin trees and shrubs so that their branches are at least 10 feet apart.

As a final check, take a stroll around your property area with an imaginary match in your hand. If you see a place where you would not feel comfortable lighting a match, throwing it down and walking away, you still have some Firewise work to do. Remember to keep a maintenance schedule to ensure your property is lean, clean, and green **before** spring and fall.

Wildfire THE NEXT STORM

To Burn or Not to Burn...

Work with your neighbors to pool resources such as wood chippers and chainsaws to clean up around your homes.

Warm, windy weather in spring creates conditions prime for wildfires. The possibility increases when people apply fire to the landscape by burning leaves, brush, and debris on the ground or in barrels. Improper or unsafe debris burning is the leading cause of wildfires in Wisconsin. More than 1,000 fires each year are caused by debris burning. Most people who burn debris never intend for their fire to spread and cause damage. In most cases, the person responsible was burning outside local restrictions. Outdoor burning in Wisconsin is regulated and permits may be required whenever the ground is not completely snow covered.

With the massive amount of storm debris on the ground in northwest Wisconsin, there is a very real likelihood that burning permits will be suspended during spring fire season. Emergency Burning Restrictions may also be in effect at some point. Make sure you are aware of any restrictions on burning BEFORE you light that match.

Alternatives to Burning

Fire management officials from the DNR and Forest Service recommend that people use alternatives to burning as they clean up fallen tree debris on their property. Use wood chippers to break down small trees and branches. Haul debris to designated brush collection sites in your area. Cut larger trees and limbs for use or sale as firewood. On large woodlots, consider leaving some fallen limbs or debris piles as shelter for birds and small animals.

Emergency Burning Restrictions

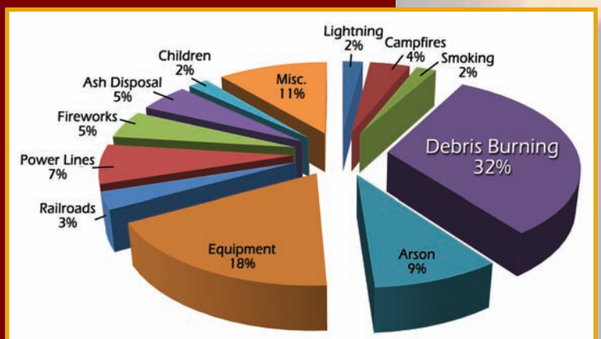
Commonly referred to as a "burn ban," Emergency Burning Restrictions are a fire prevention effort put in place when drought conditions exist and predicted fire weather conditions aim to increase the potential risk for wildfires. Emergency Burning Restrictions are implemented within the boundaries of DNR forest fire control areas and enforcement action will be taken.

The following precautions will be in place during Emergency Burning Restrictions:

- Burning permits will be suspended for burn piles and burn barrels.
- Burning of *any* combustible material outdoors will be strictly prohibited.
- Disposing of matches, ashes, charcoal briquettes or any burning material into the outdoors will be prohibited.
- It will be unlawful to build campfires in any manner except in developed camping areas. Campfires in undeveloped campsites such as wilderness areas will be prohibited.

Fast Fact: How do Wildfires Start?

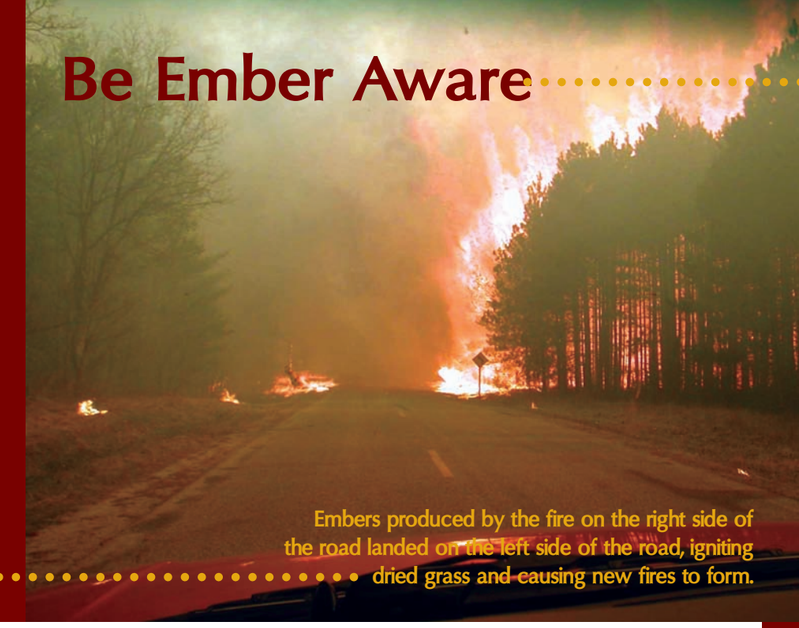
Debris burning (brush, leaves, burn barrels) is a major contributor to wildfires in Wisconsin. Most of these fires occur before 6:00 p.m. and are often a result of people burning without a permit and burning illegal items. Permits restrict burning to times when weather conditions are more favorable.



Wisconsin Wildfire Causes 2000-2010

Be Ember Aware

Firebrands are burning embers produced by wildfire which are lifted high into the air and carried beyond the fire front. Firebrands are one of the major causes of homes burned during a wildfire. Typical firebrand materials include things like pine cones and bark. Depending on wind speed and size of materials, firebrands can be carried more than ½ mile ahead of the fire front. A shower of thousands of firebrands can be produced during a major wildfire event. If these firebrands land in areas with easily ignited fuels, such as piles of leaves or pine needles, numerous spot fires can start. Homes located blocks away from the main fire front can be threatened.



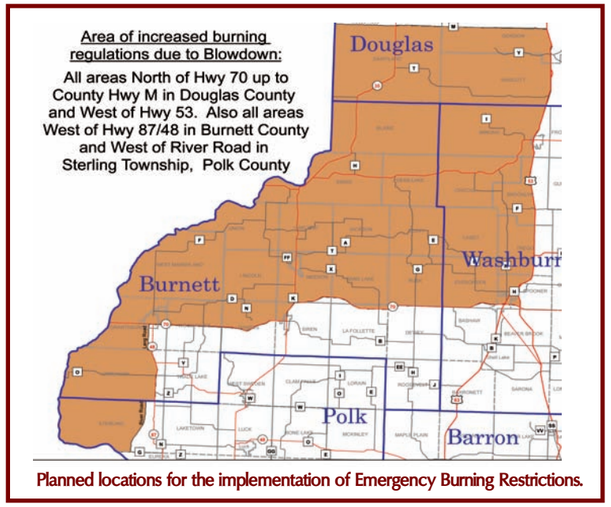
Embers produced by the fire on the right side of the road landed on the left side of the road, igniting dried grass and causing new fires to form.

- Campfires in developed campgrounds (public or private) must be in a metal fire ring and there must be a campground attendant, host, or manager on site.
- Backyard campfire pits, rings, and fireplaces are considered 'campfires' and are not allowed.
- Campfires on state lands in designated areas (State Parks/Forests) will be at the discretion of that Park/Forest. It's best to check before you burn.
- Charcoal grills may be used in the immediate vicinity of a residential dwelling if placed on a non combustible surface only (such as concrete or gravel) with significant clearance and attended at all times.
- Improper ash/briquette disposal and charcoal grill use in grassy or woody areas will be prohibited and subject to enforcement actions.
- Smoking a pipe, cigar, or cigarette will be restricted to places of residence or in a vehicle equipped with an ashtray.
- Throwing matches, ashes, or burning materials from a vehicle will be prohibited.
- All fireworks use will be prohibited.
- Welding, torching, and surface grinding in hazardous areas is prohibited.
- All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) trails may be closed due to high fire danger. Check with local trail manager before riding your ATV.
- There are no 'burning restrictions' for off-road vehicles and logging equipment, but any fire caused by such is subject to suppression costs. Be extra cautious with off-road vehicles and logging equipment in woody or grassy areas. Exhaust systems and sparks from off-road vehicles and automobiles can cause a fire.
- Do not park your vehicle on dry grass or woody debris; stay on gravel or dirt paths and roads. Check for fuel leaks. Spark arresters must be functioning properly. Carry a fire extinguisher at all times.

Liability for Wildfires

Regardless of Emergency Burning Restrictions, any individual who sets fires on any land at anytime and allows it to become a forest fire, shall be liable for all expenses incurred in the suppression of the fire by the state or town in which thefire occurred.

Any person, whose property is injured or destroyed by fires, may recover, in a civil action, the value of timber or any other damages suffered from person's causing such fires.



Planned locations for the implementation of Emergency Burning Restrictions.