



Wildfire Season

During the 2016 fall wildfire season, Virginia Department of Forestry crews responded to 172 wildfires that burned a total of 5,501 acres on privately-owned land from October 15 through November 30. The firefighters protected 412 homes and other structures, but 4 homes and 22 other structures were damaged.

“With drought conditions, warm temps, low humidity and high winds, we dealt with a number of difficult fires this fall,” said John Miller, Virginia Department of Forestry’s director of Fire and Emergency Response. “Southwest Virginia was the area with the most wildfire activity; was forced to deal with a tremendous amount of smoke from wildfires in Kentucky, Tennessee and North Carolina, and experienced a rash of arson fires in several counties.”

2016 total figures of wildfires are 525 wildfires that burned a combined 13,395 acres with 247 homes and 573 other structures protected. 80 homes and 36 structures have been damaged this year

As a citizen, what can you do to help this situation?

First, prevent a wildfire from ever starting. Residents in areas not subject to burn bans are cautioned to be extremely vigilant when burning yard debris and with any outdoor burning or open flame. **It would be best if you don't have to burn ... DON'T.** Usual outdoor recreational activities like hunting, ATV riding, target shooting, camping and hiking have the potential to start a wildfire ... accidents happen.

If a fire escapes your control or you see an active wildfire without fire personnel on scene, call 911 right away. If you notice someone or something out of the ordinary, get a description of the person and vehicle and report it to local law enforcement, as a number of these wildfires have been intentionally set. Woods arson is a serious crime and puts lives and property at risk.

Wildfires that start small and go unnoticed can spread quickly, igniting brush, trees and homes. Reduce your risk by preparing now — before wildfire strikes. Meet with your family to decide what to do and where to go if wildfires threaten your area.

Complacency Is Our Worst Enemy

The idea that it can't happen to me for some reason or another, is not valid. If all of the elements of combustion are present, fuel, heat, and oxygen, it can happen to you. Your home, along with trees and brush, could be the fuel for a wildfire.

TV News Story Homeowner talks about how Firewise help save his home.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FA-Mnykm4PQ>

NFPA Your Home Can Survive a Wildfire with Jack Coehen

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vL_syp1ZScM

Some things to know if you get caught in a wildfire!

If You Become Trapped – Stay Calm!

Survival in a Vehicle:

- This is dangerous and should only be done in an emergency, but you can survive the firestorm if you stay in your car. It is much less dangerous than trying to run from a fire on foot.
- Roll up windows and close air vents. Drive slowly with headlights on. Watch for other vehicles and pedestrians. Do not drive through heavy smoke.
- If you have to stop, park away from the heaviest trees and brush. Turn headlights on and ignition off. Keep windows rolled up and air vents closed.
- Get on the floor and cover up with a wool or 100% cotton blanket or coat.
- Stay in the vehicle until the main fire passes. **Do not run!**
- Air currents may rock the car.
- Some smoke and sparks may enter the vehicle.
- Temperature inside will increase.
- Metal gas tanks rarely explode.
- Engine may not restart.
- Use your cell phone to call 9-1-1 and notify officials of your situation and location.

While on foot:

- The best temporary shelter is in an area with little to no flammable materials such as dried leaves or branches. On a steep mountainside, the backside is safer. Avoid canyons, natural "chimneys" and saddles.
- If a road is nearby, lie face down along the road cut or in the ditch on the uphill side. Cover yourself with anything that will shield you from the fire.
- Seek a depression without underbrush, leaves, or thick weeds and then lie face down in the depression and cover yourself with NATURAL FIBER (cotton, wool) jackets, blankets, etc. Stay down until after the fire passes!
- Cover mouth and nose and cover up your body with NATURAL FIBER clothing or a blanket.
- Use your cell phone to call 9-1-1 and notify officials of your situation and location.

While at home:

- Keep your family together.
- Call 9-1-1 to notify officials of your situation and location.
- Fill sinks and tubs with cold water.
- Keep doors and windows closed, but unlocked.
- Stay inside your house.
- Stay away from outside walls and windows.
- If your house catches fire, move to the far end of the house and close windows and inside doors to restrict the spread of the fire. When it is safe to do so, exit your house and move to a "blackened" area of your property or neighborhood that has already burned. It is safer to be in an area that has already burned than an area not yet burned.

It will get hot in the house, but this is much safer than being outside and exposed to flames & dangerous fire gases.

After the fire passes:

- Check your family and neighbors.
- Check roof and exterior of house for fire.
- Check under decks and inside attic for fire.
- Check your yard for burning trees, woodpiles (between pieces of firewood), etc.
- Extinguish embers and sparks. The water you put into your pool or hot tub and other containers will come in handy now. If the power is out, try connecting a hose to the outlet on your water heater.
- Continue to check for fires, embers and sparks for at least 12 to 24 hours after the fire has passed