



Wild Fire

Summer and Fall in North America always seems to have some area that is having enough dry weather to create concern about wild fires. The concern for safety in these areas never seems to go away and wildfires can take place at any time of the year, so if you have a home in one of these locations you should plan for what to do in case of a fire. You need to be prepared to act quickly in the event of a fire emergency. This article was published in newspapers several years before being posted on the internet and in the meantime, there have been fires that have needlessly caused the deaths of people who were not prepared.

Even though we often value wooded or natural properties for their scenic value, we need to be careful of what vegetation is near homes and other structures. Some plants create a fire hazard while they are alive, some only when they are dead and others create fuel for fires through yearly dropping of dead leaves and branches.

Trees with natural oils in the trunk, branches and leaves can burn even while green. Pines, spruces and other needle leaved trees are easy to burn, especially if the weather has been dry before the fire starts. Many trees lose lots of leaves in the fall, even evergreens lose some of their needles each year. Some palm trees keep the old fans of leaves stuck on the trunk for several years after they die. Ornamental grasses and other perennials die to the ground each fall, leaving fuel for fires.

Any area experiencing a drought has a greater chance of a fire and a greater chance of a bad fire because of the amount of fuel available. Dry weather causes the fuel of dead material on the ground to be dry and to burn better. It causes the live trees to have less water in the trunk, branches and leaves and so they burn better too. Long spells of dry weather kill more plants and it causes the existing plants to have more dead leaves on them, especially plants like palms and palmettos that are normally evergreen. Plants that have fuel attached to the trunk encourage fires that kill the trunk, instead of just burning on the ground and going past the trunk without out harming it.

In the natural course of time, natural areas have fires that burn up the extra fuel materials and through a series of small fires, the fuel is kept to small amounts, thus helping to prevent huge fires. Suppressing fires for many years allows the build up of lots of fuel for fires and when a fire finally does come it will burn for a long time in each location. The longer a fire burns in one spot the more damage it can do to the live trees.

Removing the fuel by hand, every couple of years can keep the amount of fuel down to manageable levels, but this is not an easy task. It is very helpful to do this if the area has

been in a drought. Clear any debris from within a twenty to thirty feet of the house. Keep the lawn and ground cover plants cut short during dry weather.

Cut back branches overhanging the roof, they can provide easily combustible roof debris. A roof of ceramic tiles is a good idea in wooded areas. Wooden shingles, wooden decks and wooden siding are just more fuel for the fire. Also, be sure to keep the gutters empty of debris.

It is a good idea to create your own supply of water to use for fighting the fire around the house. Rainwater in barrels is probably not enough, but a small pond or swimming pool might be. What ever you use, be sure it has water in it.

Get a generator, a water pump, piping, and sprinkler heads and set up the whole system so it can spray water on the house whenever it is on. The generator and pump should be checked on a monthly basis (on the same day you make the house payment). Everyone in the family should know how to run it, just in case they are the only ones home.

No matter what the source of water is, the fire fighting pipes need to be separate from the filters and the inlet should be at the deep end. All kinds of plastic and PVC pipes can be used underground, but use metal pipes above ground. Use pipes big enough to carry all the water the pump can create. Test the sprinklers to see that they cover the whole house and some of the surrounding landscape.

After the fire, the rains will come back and the slopes will be unprotected, so be sure to prepare ahead for mudslides.