

Wildfire Season Is Coming Is Your District Prepared?

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The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection's (CAL FIRE) 2022 forecast confirms California will continue to experience longer wildfire seasons. This year, extended dryness with little perception will leave most of the state in moderate to extreme drought conditions which will increase the potential for wildland fire activity.

We don't know where the wildfires will hit, but we do know they are coming. What steps can your district take to mitigate the effects of wildfires? How can your district become resilient during this ever-changing exposure? Read on for guidance on detecting your district's vulnerabilities, the importance of planning ahead, and what to do after a fire disaster.

Evaluating Your District's Risk Of Wildfires

Existing law requires CAL FIRE to identify "very high fire hazard severity zones" in the state, based on specified criteria. It also requires agencies, located in the high-hazard severity zones, to have an elevated defensible space program.

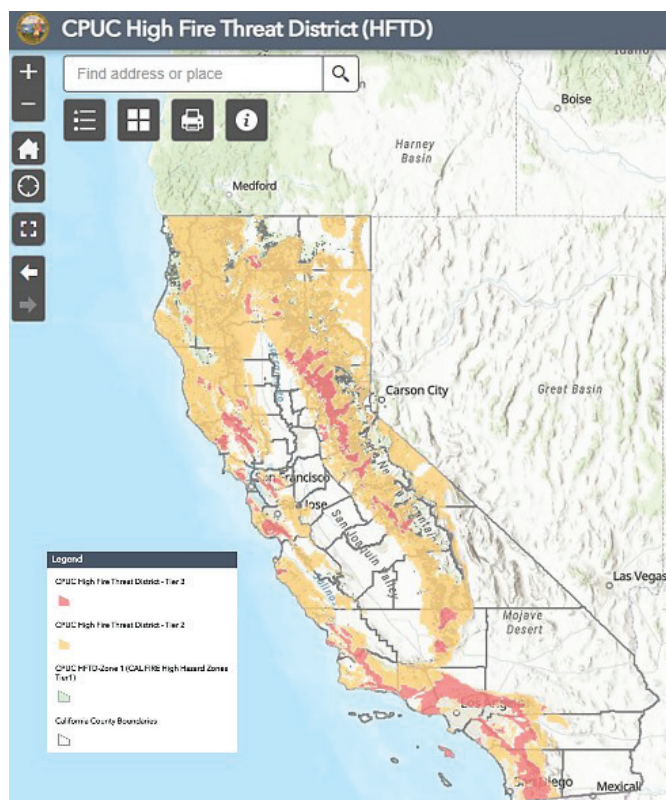
We all know wildfires can spread throughout the state, but it would be useful to determine if your district is located within an established high hazard severity zone. The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) has developed a searchable map where users can select their location or enter an address to identify their fire threat. Go to cpuc.ca.gov and search 'Fire Threat Maps and Fire Safety Rulemaking' and select the HFTD Map – GIS web app viewer link. Note: This tool was last updated August 29, 2021, and it is not considered an official CAL FIRE map.

Even if your district is not considered to be in the high-hazard zone, it is still recommended to implement the following strategies.

PLAN AHEAD

Protecting Property and Buildings

Protecting your property and buildings is a key consideration in mitigating wildfire losses. Evaluating your vulnerabilities will help you identify actions prior to a wildfire.



Creating defensible space around your property

Defensible space is meant to slow the spread of wildfires. It is a buffer created between a building and the landscape or wildland area surrounding it. CAL FIRE outlines the defensible space zones at readyforwildfire.org. Remember to check your local government and fire agencies for any additional defensible space or weed abatement ordinance requirements. Please note, the outlined information is a condensed version of CAL FIRE’s defensible space zone criteria. Refer to the [readyforwildfire](http://readyforwildfire.org) website for additional details.

- **Zone 1 – Lean, Clean and Green Zone** - Extends **30 feet** from buildings, structures, and decks, or the property line, whichever is closer. Remove all dead foliage, such as plants, grass, weeds, leaves, and pine needles. Also remove leaves and pine needles from building roofs and rain gutters. Trim trees to keep branches at least 10 feet from other trees and remove branches that hang over the roof. Remove or prune flammable plants, especially near windows. If there is a chimney, keep dead branches 10 feet away and relocate wood piles to Zone 2. Contact CAL FIRE for additional clearance requirements if your district has commercial gas storage tanks or other flammable materials storage buildings.

- **Zone 2 – Reduce Fuel Zone** - Extends from 30 feet to 100 feet out from buildings, structures, decks, etc. or to the property line, whichever is closer. Ensure grass is cut to more than 4 inches and remove fallen leaves, needles, twigs, bark, cones, and small branches. It is critical to have adequate spacing between grass, shrubs, and trees to reduce the spread of wildfire. Spacing is determined by the type and size of plants and trees as well as the slope of the land. Review the CAL FIRE guidance on horizontal and vertical plant and tree spacing. Ensure exposed wood piles have at least 10 feet of clearance in all directions.
- **Zone 0 (Coming in 2023)** - Assembly Bill 3074 requires a third ember-resistant zone within 0-5 feet of buildings. The Bill requires the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection to develop the regulation by January 1, 2023. The ember-resistant is designed to keep fire or embers from igniting materials that can spread the fire directly to buildings.

Consider fire smart landscaping as an added measure of protection. CAL FIRE urges the use of “fire-resistant plants that are strategically planted to resist the spread of fire to your buildings”. Fire resistant plants are often drought tolerant, as well. Additional information is available at readyforwildfire.org.

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Hardening your buildings against wildfires

There are generally three ways your buildings can be exposed to wildfire; direct flames from a wildfire or other neighboring burning buildings, radiant heat from nearby burning plants or structures; or flying embers. Flying embers from a wildfire can destroy buildings up to a mile away and are responsible for the destruction of most homes during a wildfire.

- **Roofs** - Wood or shingle roofs are at high risk of being destroyed during a wildfire. Materials such as composition, metal, clay, or tile are recommended. Remove vegetative debris from roofs and keep rain gutters clear or enclose rain gutters to prevent accumulation of plant debris.
- **Vents** – Cover vent openings with tightly woven metal mesh to reduce openings for flying embers. Consider ember and flame-resistant vents such as Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) vents.
- **Windows** – Wildfire heat can cause windows to break even before the building is on fire which allows flying embers to enter the building. Single-paned and large windows are particularly vulnerable. Consider dual-paned windows to reduce of breakage. Installing screens may also reduce embers from entering the building. Remember to keep plants trimmed near windows.

CAL FIRE provides additional guidance on fire resistant materials for walls, decks, and other areas at readyforwildfire.org.

Conducting an asset inventory

Make certain your interior and exterior assets are documented, preferably with photos and/or videos. Document information such as building names, values, content values, GPS coordinates, property descriptions, serial numbers, purchase and replacement cost values, etc. Make duplicates and store this information in a secure location.

Developing Emergency Response Programs and Procedures

Planning ahead includes developing emergency response procedures to guide your district when an emergency event occurs. Taking the time to develop customized plans is essential; however, it's equally important to train, test, and practice the procedures to ensure they are effective. If you already have procedures in place, it's a good time to ensure they are up to date.

Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP)

Public entities today face challenges unlike any that have been seen before. In addition to natural causes, such as wildfires and floods, man-made causes such as civil unrest,



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terrorism, transportation accidents, technology failures, and disease pandemics have triggered major service disruptions to both public and private operations.

Continuity of operations planning is part of the fundamental mission of public entities. The changing threat environment and the severity of natural and man-made disasters highlight the need for careful continuity of operations planning that enables agencies to continue their essential functions across a broad spectrum of emergencies disrupting normal operations.

The COOP process focuses on two questions, (1) what operations performed by the district are critical and essential? and (2) what resources are required to continue those essential operations during an emergency or disruption. FEMA has identified the following elements the COOP should cover:

- Essential Functions and Services
- Orders of Succession
- Delegation of Authority
- Devolution (transfer of authority)
- Continuity Facilities (alternate locations)
- Communications
- Vital Records Management
- Human Capital (critical staff to the essential functions and services)

- Training, testing, and exercises
- Reconstitution (pathway to returning to daily operations)

Development resources are available at fema.gov. FEMA has developed a Continuity Resource Toolkit to provide agencies at all levels of government, with tools, templates, and resources to help develop and maintain a successful continuity program.

Wildfire Emergency Recovery Assistance Plan

The optimum time to identify emergency recovery resources is before a wildfire incident occurs. Research local, state, and federal resources available to your district as well as your employees and develop an action plan that will be ready if needed. Resources:

- FEMA Assistance for Governments and Private Non-Profits After a Disaster fema.gov/assistance/public
- FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Programs Post Fire fema.gov/grants/mitigation/post-fire
- The California Office of Emergency Services (OES) wildfirerecovery.caloes.ca.gov.

A Pre-Fire Planning guide is available from the US Fire Administration/FEMA at usfa.fema.gov/blog/ci-102220.html



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Emergency Action Plan – CCR Title 8, 3220

Cal/OSHA requires California employers to have an Emergency Action Plan (EAP) in place. The purpose of the EAP is to establish emergency response procedures to safeguard employees and on-site visitors in the event of an emergency. It outlines evacuation procedures, shelter-in-place procedures, emergency kits, emergency shelter in place supplies, and other relevant procedures based on potential emergencies that may occur.

In addition to general procedures, the EAP should include procedures for specific types of emergencies, such as building fires, earthquakes, floods, utility outage, etc. In addition to your building fire procedures, it is recommended that you add procedures on wildfire response, for example:

- A system to monitor wildfire incidents near your district. You can sign up to receive current information about active wildfires near you through the readyforwildfire.org site.
- Identifying your local emergency response contacts and evacuation centers. As well as information on evacuation routes and other pertinent information.
- Ensuring enough water and non-perishable supplies are available to last up to three days.
- Determining early employee evacuation conditions designed to allow employees to return home and manage

their personal wildfire planning. We encourage you to share the CAL FIRE resources with your employees so they can have a wildfire plan in place.

Fire Prevention Plan – CCR 3221

Cal/OSHA also requires California employers to have a Fire Prevention Plan (FPP). The FPP is different than an EAP because it focuses on the fire control equipment and systems in place. Procedures must be developed to identify potential fire hazards, ignitions sources, and control measures.

Wildfire Smoke - CCR Title 8, 5141.1

During a wildfire incident your district may require employees to work outdoors, which may expose them to unhealthy air. Cal/OSHA has adopted the Wildfire Smoke Standard to help protect employees under these conditions. The standard applies to worksites where the current Air Quality Index (AQI) for airborne particulate matter (PM2.5) is 151 or greater and where it is reasonably anticipated employees could be exposed to wildfire smoke. When the standard applies, employers are required to do conduct the following:

- Check the AQI - In the event of a wildfire, employers must check the current AQI for PM 2.5 periodically throughout each shift. An Airnow.gov app is available. If the trigger of 151 is ever exceeded employers must conduct training



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outlined Cal/OSHA's Section 5141.1 Appendix B.

- Reduce the exposure - Employers must identify ways to lower employee exposure to wildfire smoke, where feasible. Such as:
 - Locate work indoors or in vehicles where the air is filtered
 - Change procedures to allow work to be moved to a location where the AQI is lower
 - Reduce work time in areas without filtered air
 - Increase time and frequency of breaks in filtered air
 - Lower the physical intensity of work to lower breathing and heart rates
- Provide respiratory protection - Employers must provide or require respirators for employees working outdoors depending on the PM 2.5 airborne levels.
 - Voluntary Use - If the employee exposure cannot be reduced to an AQI of 151 or less of PM 2.5, then employees must be provided with respirators, such as N95 masks for voluntary use.
 - Required Use - Respirator use is mandatory or required when the AQI exceeds 500 for PM 2.5. Employees must receive a medical clearance, respirator fit testing and training prior to wearing a respirator under these conditions.
- Note: The following workplaces and operations are exempt from this standard:
 - Enclosed buildings or structures where the air is filtered by a mechanical ventilation system
 - Enclosed vehicles where the air is filtered by a cabin air filter
 - The AQI for PM2.5 is below 151
 - Employees who are exposed to a current AQI for PM2.5 of 151 or greater for a total of one hour or less during a shift

- Firefighters engaged in wildland firefighting

DURING THE WILDFIRE

When advised by emergency authorities to evacuate, do so immediately and follow your EAP evacuation procedures; modifications may be needed based on the conditions. If ordered not to evacuate follow, your EAP shelter-in place procedures. Make sure employees and on-site guests are accounted for and safe. If you have any injured employees or guests, call 911. If it's safe to do so monitor boilers and check for pipe breakage, fires, and other damages. Call emergency responders if warranted.

RECOVERY

After the wildfire consider the following:

- If your district's property has been damaged by a wildfire incident, contact your property & liability provider. They will provide direction on the next steps, including mitigating additional damage, remedial actions to take, submitting a claims process, and other guidance.
- Review your COOP to ensure your district's plan to continue essential operations during this disruption is operational. Make adjustments as warranted.
- If you have employees who are required to work outdoors during this time, ensure you are providing the proper personal protective equipment and continue to monitor the Air Quality index.
- If approved to return to your property be aware of potential hazards, such as gas leaks, broken glass, damaged electrical wiring, etc. If in doubt have your building inspected by a qualified inspector before entering.
- Review your Wildfire Recovery Assistance Plan and take action. 🇺🇸

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