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Wildfire Awareness Month Puts Spotlight on Making Homes Safe from Wildfire

May is Wildfire Awareness Month in Oregon, and federal, state and firefighting agencies are encouraging homeowners to make sure their homes are protected from wildfire.

The Oregon Department of Forestry, Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal and Keep Oregon Green, in collaboration with Oregon forest protective associations, the Office of Emergency Management and federal wildland agencies, are taking this opportunity to promote defensible space around homes before fire strikes this summer.

“The roof is the most critical part of the house when it comes to wildfire protection,” says Oregon State Fire Marshal Jim Walker. “Embers can collect and ignite on the roof, in gutters and enter unscreened openings around the house. Although non-combustible roofing material is preferred, regardless of the construction, keep roofs, gutters and eaves clear of all leaves, pine needles and other flammable debris.”

To reduce the risk, fire officials suggest removing dead vegetation a minimum of 30 feet around your house and other structures. In most cases, trees and healthy plants do not need to be removed. However, trees should be pruned and grass kept short and green to keep fire on the ground and more manageable by fire crews. Maintain a five-foot fire-free area closest to the home using nonflammable landscaping material and fire resistant plants.

“Defensible space is a property’s first line of defense against wildfire,” says Oregon Department of Forestry Fire Prevention Coordinator Tom Fields. “Creating and maintaining defensible space around homes can improve your property’s likelihood of surviving a wildfire. Having defensible space also makes it safer for firefighters who may have to defend someone’s home.”

Homeowners should also consider access issues for large fire trucks. Long driveways should be at least 12 feet wide, have 10 feet of vegetation clearance from the centerline out, and about 14 feet overhead. Large vehicle turnaround areas are critical for your safety as well as firefighter safety.

Should a fire occur near a community, Oregon Office of Emergency Management Director Andrew Phelps encourages residents to be prepared if an evacuation is necessary. “Wildfires can come without warning and move quickly, so residents need to prepare now in case they have to leave their home,” Phelps said. “Make sure to put together a ‘Go Kit,’ register for emergency notification systems in your community, and make a plan where your family will go and how you will stay in contact if evacuated.”

It is the homeowner’s responsibility to protect their homes by building defensible space. For more information, visit the websites for the [Office of State Fire Marshal](#), the [Office of Emergency Management](#), [Keep Oregon Green](#) and the [Oregon Department of Forestry](#), or call your nearest [ODF or forest protective association office](#).

Additional information on preparing for wildfires can be found on the [Ready.gov website](#).

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