

# Basalt & Rural Fire Protection District

## Wildland-Urban Interface Fire Information Guide



### **Urban Interface Defined**

The wildland-urban interface, (WUI), is a geographical area where structures and other human development meets or intermingles with wildland or vegetative fuels. This situation creates a tremendous danger of flames or embers from a wildland fire coming in contact with the structures.

**Defensible Space** is an area, either natural or manmade, where materials capable of allowing a fire to spread unchecked has been treated, cleared or modified to slow the rate and intensity of an advancing wildfire and to create an area for fire suppression to occur.

### **What Can You Do To Protect Your Property?**

The best time to prepare is before a wildfire strikes. People have a right to live wherever they choose, however, there is a perception that the fire department will provide protection at every location during a wildfire. This is an unrealistic assumption since a fast moving wildfire can instantly overwhelm a fire departments manpower and equipment. You must take measures to protect yourself if the fire department is unable to respond. As property owners you own the land and the fire that burns upon it. The intensity of a fire is totally up to you. Through education, prevention and the creation of a defensible space you can increase the chances of protecting your home and property from wildland fires.

### **Managing The Health And Survivability Of Your Property**

Defensible space creates an area that is essential to helping firefighters steer the fire *around* your home rather than it passing *through* your home. Firefighters will protect the homes they believe they can save. To create a defensible space it is important to understand that wildfires are dependent on three factors: weather, topography and vegetation, which is the fuel for the fire. Of the three factors, fuel is the only one that can be controlled. The amount of fuel, proximity to your home, size of the fuels (trunk diameter) and compactness can be altered. A continuous path of fuel acts like a fuse to

bring a fire to your home. Clearing away diseased, dead or dying limbs, shrubs, grasses and trees can greatly assist in the survivability of your home and increase the health of vegetation and the wildlife it supports. Being able to walk in among trees and shrubs is much more favorable than an impenetrable, compact mass of dead or dying vegetation.

### **Hazard Assessment Rating**

At your request a representative of the Basalt Fire Department or the Eagle County Mitigation Specialist will conduct a free assessment of your properties wildfire hazard rating. This rating is based on a point system that evaluates factors such as; road conditions, vegetation, slope, building construction, water availability and fire response. This rating can help determine the extent of vegetation management needed to provide safety against wildfire.

### **Financial Assistance**

Federal, State and local grant money is often available to assist property owners in their defensible space project. Contact your local Fire Department for details.

### **Vegetation Management Zones for Defensible Space**

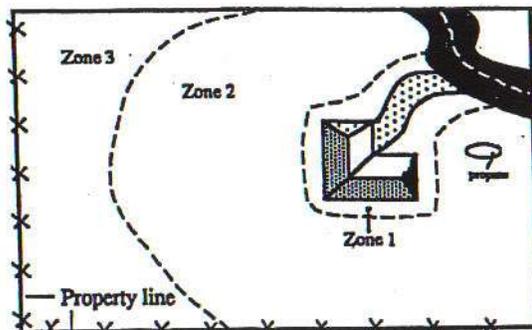


Figure 1: Forested property showing the three fire-defensible zones around a home or other structure.

**Zone 1:** An area measured 15 feet around the structure where all flammable vegetation is removed. Remaining vegetation should be non-combustible. Firewood and other debris around or under the structure should be relocated. Enclose or screen around decks. Remaining trees should be pruned of dead limbs.

**Zone 2:** The size of this zone depends on the slope and property boundaries. Typically 75 to 125 feet from the structure, the fuel load will be reduced and the arrangement modified. Remove dead trees and shrubs. Trees will be thinned and pruned. Grasses will be mowed to 6 inches or less.

**Zone 3:** this zone extends from the edge of zone 2 to the property line and is an area of traditional forest management to enhance the overall health of the forest and benefit wildlife.

Because the forest environment is always changing you will need to periodically maintain the defensible space zones.

### **Other Factors**

**Building construction** is a major factor influencing the survivability of a home. Studies show that burning embers carried ahead of the fire by wind and heat, not direct flame impingement, cause a significant number of home ignitions. These embers lodge unnoticed on combustible roofs, in eaves, gutters and under decks starting fires before or after the main fire front has moved through. Using non-combustible or fire resistant building materials greatly decreases ignition potential. Log or wood sided homes with wood shingled roofs, wood decks and eaves may be written off as indefensible by firefighters sent to protect them.

**Can firefighters find your home?** Street signs and addresses need to be visible; if we can't find you we can't help you.

Firefighters will avoid unsafe driveways. Driveways should be wide enough and have turnarounds or turnouts for fire engines. Bridges and culverts should be marked with load limits or fire trucks may not cross them.

**Maintain water supplies that meet fire department standards.** Hydrants, cisterns, ponds, well and storage tanks should be clearly marked for easy firefighter access.

**Wildfires occur every year.** Most go unnoticed by the public because the Fire Department extinguishes them before they become a threat. They could also spread quickly, igniting grass, brush, trees and homes before we can contain them.

The dedicated volunteers of the Basalt Fire Department are committed to providing the best fire protection possible for the community we serve. Through a partnership with property owners we hope to reduce your risk by preparing *now*-before a wildfire strikes.

**Information borrowed from:  
Colorado State University Cooperative Extension Publication # 6.303**

**The 2003 International Urban-Wildland Interface Code.**