The goal of an effective wildfire protection plan is to keep the fire from coming dangerously close to any structure on the property. This includes a house and any agricultural buildings or outbuildings. Once ignited, the structure itself can become a fire source that can generate wind-driven embers that will threaten and could ignite neighboring properties. Fire science has shown properties located less than 15 feet apart are particularly vulnerable to this type of fire spread. More information about protecting your home is available from your insurance agent or online at www.disastersafety.org/wildfire.

Think of anything surrounding or even attached to a structure on the property as a potential wick that could drive the fire dangerously close. This might include hay stacks, livestock feed, and fuel stored to perform normal business operations. Remember wind-driven fire embers, not flames, are the biggest threat to properties during a wildfire. Once embers land on a combustible material, the potential for the wildfire to spread is significantly greater.

Erecting fences, installing a security system and adding motion-detection lighting are all things security experts recommend for keeping intruders out. Think of defensible space zones the same way. Each zone acts as a layer of protection between the farm or ranch and the approaching wildfire. Keep in mind, just as with security systems, these zones are only as effective if they are properly maintained.

Wildfires threaten property owners in 38 states, whether in forests, grasslands or wooded areas. The risks facing farms and ranches are significantly different from solely residential areas and require special planning. This is primarily due to the quantity of fuel and chemicals stored on site, livestock concerns, and the tendency for normal business operations to generate significant quantities of combustible dust. Once sparked, fire can quickly spread and result in economic and personal upheaval. Take control before a wildfire threatens and leverage the power to manage the risk to your property. This guide contains a simple – yet effective – three-step process to preparing for, responding to and recovering from a wildfire. Read, share it with employees and transform risk into resiliency.

The most likely wildfire threat to your farm or ranch will be from a moving fire. Preparation before the wildfire will be critical to minimizing damage to your home and property. A key concept for protecting your property is creating “defensible space,” which means you are managing vegetation and placement of other combustible materials to minimize the ability of the fire to move through your property, and reduce the chance that flames will be able to contact and ignite combustible, buildings and equipment.
ACTIONS TO TAKE BEFORE A WILDFIRE:

- Develop evacuation plans for you and your employees. Conduct practice drills with family members and employees.
- Develop an evacuation plan for livestock, including alternative locations for housing animals as appropriate.
- Determine what your priorities are should you have to choose which of your assets to protect. (e.g., buildings, livestock, machinery, and feed).
- Relocate the propane tanks at least 30 feet from any structures on the property or, if relocation is not an option, create a 10-foot noncombustible zone around the tank. An alternative solution is to enclose the tank using noncombustible materials.
- Where applicable, indicate the locations of septic tanks and leach fields with fencing or other signage. Heavy equipment, including fire trucks and other equipment, can damage these systems and may result in the trucks getting stuck.
- Farms and ranches by their very nature are located in rural areas and likely away from traditional fire hydrants. Create and maintain water storage capabilities, such as a pond, water tank or cistern. Working with the local fire department can help determine best practices. Create signage to alert firefighters to the location of the water supply.
- To the extent possible, separate and consolidate combustible materials and equipment. Create low combustible zones around buildings, such as barns and storage sheds, through the use of a concrete slab or gravel paths. These zones should be about 5 feet wide, extending outward from the building. Inspect these zones regularly and keep them clear of debris.
- Dust can become an ignition source, particularly for wind-blown fire brands, if an excessive amount is allowed to accumulate on surfaces. Minimize dust accumulation on surfaces, including those that may become heated by the regular operation of farm machinery.
- Create fire breaks around pastures and regularly maintain these areas. Fire breaks should be 100 feet wide. Crops can become fuel and help to spread a wildfire, so maintain good defensible space between crops, structures and combustibles stored on-site. Irrigating pastures is a good option for limiting the start of spot fires.

ACTIONS TO TAKE DURING A WILDFIRE:

- The first priority should be to protect human life. Livestock and employee evacuation plans should be in effect as soon as possible after observing or being notified of an oncoming wildfire.
- If you are trapped inside a burning building, follow fire-safe procedures and precautions regarding opening doors, staying low to the ground, and covering your mouth with a cloth to avoid breathing smoke.