WORKING TOGETHER TO MANAGE RISK

Wildfires

Taming the risk of wildfires

As the global climate changes, wildfires seem to be becoming more frequent and severe. So if your home or business is located near trees, scrub or dry grass, it's worth knowing the risks and having some preparation in place.

What kind of buildings are at risk?

Never underestimate the speed at which a wildfire moves. Anything in the path of a fire is at risk – but even buildings outside of the direct path can be affected by wind-blown embers for example, which can also start spot fires many kilometres away. Fuel sources for fires can include:

- Dry and/or long grass
- Plants
- Outdoor furniture covers
- Wood piles
- Leaf and other debris in gutters and under decks
- Combustible items stored under houses.

A lot can be done to reduce the risk of wildfire to buildings. It also pays to work together with neighbours to reduce the fire danger.

Safety first

Even if you take every precaution it might not be enough. Your safety is the first priority. Make sure you have an escape plan and put together an emergency kit of essentials in case you need to evacuate. Report fire/smoke to 111 and comply with **all** evacuation instructions – by the time a fire is near your property it may be too late to evacuate.

Be aware of the local fire danger, you can find up-to-date information on the Fire Emergency New Zealand (FENZ) website or visit **fireweather.niwa.co.nz**. Be extra vigilant on days of moderate to high fire danger and limit and delay any activities that may spark a fire.

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Special rules for rural areas

Fire can be a useful land management tool in rural areas and on farms. Before a burn always check the fire season, and make sure you have your permit if required. FENZ provides advice to help you keep safe and comply with the law – **fireandemergency.nz**

Landscaping for wildfire safety

- Keep driveways wide, if possible to allow access for fire trucks – a corridor 4 metres wide and 4 metres high and adequate turning space. Think about easy access to water if it's available on site.
- Have your RAPID rural property number visible from the road and quote this if you need to call the Fire Service.
- Create a fire break around homes and buildings – at least 10 metres around your home, and ideally 30 metres if possible.
- Within the 10 metre zone remove bushes and shrubs, convert to lawn and keep these short and gardens well maintained. Clean up fallen leaves, twigs and debris regularly.
- Fire resistant plants can help create a fire break and heat shield. And don't forget to cut back trees and shrubs overhanging buildings or power lines (but let the power company know first!) For more information see: **fireandemergency.nz/outdoor-and-rural-fire-safety/farms-rural-properties-and-rural-businesses/rural-property-checklist/**
- Within the 10 to 30 metre zone remove dead or dying trees, prune large trees, remove branches within 2 metres of the ground and thin out smaller trees so that there is 3 to 6 metres between treetops (crowns).

Be fire-smart when building

While no building is ever 'fire proof' you can massively reduce the wildfire risk. When building consider terrain, prevailing wind directions, location of vegetation and forest stands and position buildings to minimise the impact of a wildfire.

- Think about using non-combustible building materials e.g. metal roofs, brick clad walls, metal gutters, metal fencing etc. For tiled roofs use a fire-resistant lining under the tiles.
- Use a fire-retardant sealant on cladding and paintwork on timber buildings.
- Install double glazed windows to reduce the effect of radiant heat on the inside of the building.
- Ensure vent pipes for LP gas cylinder installations are facing away from the building.
- Consider installing a sprinkler installation in buildings or having some form of drencher systems to wet down roofs and gutters. (Specialist advice should be sought for this).

Regular maintenance is key

- Install metal gutter guards that prevent leaves and other debris collecting in the gutters.
- Repair damaged or missing tiles on the roof or verandas.
- Install fine metal mesh screens on windows and doors or install non-combustible shutters.
- Enclose decks and areas under the house to prevent debris collecting.
- Repair or cover gaps in external walls and add a screen to any vents.

Everyday top tips

- Make sure you totally extinguish any fire you light, eg charcoal BBQ, fire pit, brazier.
- Make sure your home, contents and business insurance is up to date.
- Keep important documents in a fire rated document safe or have them packed ready to take if you evacuate.
- Have a plan for family pets, animals and livestock. Businesses should consider a business continuity plan that includes response to a wildfire. This should include an up-to-date asset register.
- Have equipment available to extinguish spot fires or douse embers e.g. ladders, spade, shovel, rakes, garden hoses etc. Hoses should have metal fittings and be long enough to reach around your house.
- Replace combustible door mats with non-combustible ones.
- Use and store fuels such as petrol and LP gas safely. These should be stored in a shed away from the home and main buildings. The shed should be clearly marked as containing hazardous substances.
- Ahead of a fire, clear gutters of leaves and debris, block gutter downpipes with a towel or small bag and fill the gutters with water. This will reduce the risk of embers falling from the roof into the gutter and igniting debris or combustible guttering.
- Fit seals around doors and windows to eliminate gaps. A wet towel or blanket can also be used.
- Dispose of fireplace ash in a metal container or wet with water. Ash can retain heat and can start a fire several days later.
- Store firewood at least 10 metres from the house or building.
- Park vehicles a good distance away from buildings and maintain machinery and equipment properly. (While you're there, check for birds' nests in or around machinery as these are a common cause of machinery fires which could spread!)
- Talk to your local fire brigade to find out what will help them in a fire. As a starting point consider:
  - Making sure your property is clearly identifiable e.g. house numbers or in rural areas your RAPID number.
  - Identifying the location of water sources such as swimming pools, tanks or dams so firefighters know where they can get water.
  - Install fire brigade compatible couplings to water storage tanks as this will help fire fighters.

Visit **vero.co.nz/risk-profiler** to check out our other risk guides for more tips and in-depth information about managing risk.

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