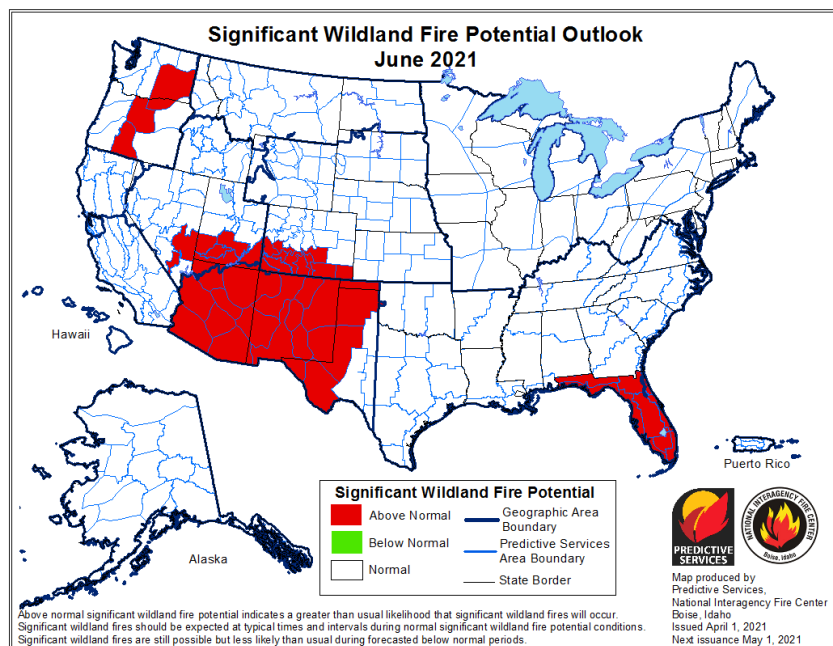


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How to Minimize Your Exposure to Wildland Fire Loss

May is Wildfire Awareness Month in many areas. The National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC), the nation’s support center for wildland firefighting, reported an average of 15,345 wildland fires and nearly one million acres of burned land per year over the past ten years. Total losses from property damage exceeded \$5 billion during this span.

In 2021, initial activity is expected to be *above normal* in the Northern and Southern plains, and Florida. The spring season “green up” should help to mitigate risk for those regions, but in the Great Basin and Rocky Mountain areas, activity is expected to pick up at this point in the year. By mid-summer, conditions are expected to increase wildfire risk in Central Oregon, Central and Southeast Washington, and portions of the Coast Ranges, Sierra, and Cascades in California. In general, the Southwest carries greater potential for wildland fires during most parts of the year, but wildfires are possible in many regions of the country.



Organizations must be prepared to minimize wildland fire exposures that threaten personnel safety, property loss, and operations. The following are some simple steps that business owners and stakeholders should take to help minimize loss from wildland fires and other emergencies:

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Create a defensible space around your structures—defensible space includes 3 zones:

- 1 a. **Zone #1** is the critical non-combustible zone. It is 0-5 ft. from the building and under any decks or combustible platforms. Plant and material selection is critical in Zone 1. Hardscape and non-combustible mulch products should be used wherever possible. Keep plants watered, trimmed, and pruned to avoid the accumulation of dried leaves and foliage that may otherwise act as a fuel source for embers and the like. Ensure the non-combustible zone extends vertically at least 6" above grade to include siding, sheathing, and structural framing.
- b. **Zone #2** extends from 5-30 ft. from the building structure. Maintain trees and ensure that shrubs are in well-spaced groups. Tree crowns should be at least 10' apart. Remove all dead material, prune tree limbs and branches up to a height of 15'. For shorter trees, low branches should not exceed 1/3 of the tree height.
- c. **Zone #3** range is 30–100 ft. from the building structure. Make sure to maintain plants in this zone that will slow down and reduce the energy of a wildland fire if one were to occur. Keep foliage cut back to minimize fuel loading as much as possible.

Evaluate your property for the use of non-combustible materials.

- 2 Areas to examine, include building signage, roofs, fences, and exterior walls/siding. Your plan may involve replacing combustible materials or perhaps using fire retardant sprays/foams. Many people are unaware there are classes of roofing materials which are more resistant to fire than others types.

Reduce the landscape fuels by establishing a property and vegetation maintenance plan.

- 3 Remove dead vegetation and trim area trees regularly. Choose landscape that will not contribute to fire loading and growth wherever possible. Non-combustible hardscape and fire-resistant vegetation are desirable, though they may not be as aesthetically pleasing as other plants, shrubs, or trees.

Identify exterior building venting in attics, roofs, gables, and crawlspaces.

- 4 **Install metal screens of 1/8" or finer** across the vents to block windblown embers from entering these spaces. If possible, close attic, crawl space, and ventilation ducts to reduce the possibility of fire and smoke traveling throughout the building. Inspect the screens regularly to ensure they have not been damaged or compromised.

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Protect elevated decks, balconies, and canopies:

- 5
 - a. Minimize or eliminate storage of combustible materials and fuels underneath these elevated structures.
 - a. Eliminate foliage and trees underneath or adjacent to the deck to prevent fire spread from the natural environment to the building's structure.

Keep a watchful eye on the situation:

- 6 Monitor broadcasts and alerts using a combination of apps, conventional radio, and emergency radio. This is helpful to track fire progression and determine when there is a safe window to leave if needed.

Prepare a disaster kit.

- 7 Each employee should be responsible to assemble and manage their own disaster kit. The contents should be able to sustain an individual for a minimum of three days and include water and food, a flashlight, first-aid materials, batteries, moist tolettes, local maps, and a whistle.

Designate a clean room to offer a space with fresh air to building occupants.

- 8 Even if the fire does not directly impact your operations, smoke and smog levels often reach unhealthy levels during wildfires. Keep vents and dampers closed to minimize outside air and maintain a "clean room" on site; this may help prevent acute and chronic health issues from being exacerbated by the fire's products of combustion.

Communicate with the Community.

- 9 Avoid negative backlash from customers by communicating with them upfront about delayed deliveries or reduced hours that are a direct or indirect result of a fire. Reducing customer traffic to offices, storefronts, and retail locations can also help minimize road congestion and bottlenecks, and improve emergency vehicle access.

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Develop written wildfire response procedures within your emergency action plan.

The overall plan will include specific procedures to address any potential emergencies such as tornadoes, earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, hail, as well as wildland fire. Some of the procedures and responsibilities for these emergencies will overlap.

- 10 Establish a business contingency or continuity plan as part of this written response plan to help ensure that your organization can get back up to operational speed as soon as possible.

The more detailed and comprehensive your plan, the better you will be positioned to handle an emergency and reduce loss or down time with critical operations. Ensure that business partner agreements are conducted before a disaster strikes to prevent gouging and guarantee available services as best as possible. At a minimum, the plan should include contingent locations, back-up power generation, and vendor and contractor agreements.

RESOURCES:

1. National Interagency Coordination Center:
<https://www.predictiveservices.nifc.gov/outlooks/outlooks.htm>
Provides outlook and general maps for fire potential. Recently released predictive outlook summary.
2. California: Fire Hazard Severity Zones: <https://ucanr.edu/sites/fire/Prepare/>
Provides fire hazard rating by location.
3. DisasterSafety.org: <https://disastersafety.org/wildfire/wildfire-ready-business/>
Provides information on types of fire-resistant roofs and other best practices.

For additional information contact:

Tribal First Risk Control Consulting: riskcontrol@tribalfirst.com or (949) 260-5042.

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