

WILDFIRE

DEFINITION – A wildfire is a raging, uncontrolled fire that spreads rapidly through vegetative fuels, exposing and possibly consuming structures. Wildfires often begin unnoticed and can spread quickly, creating dense smoke that can be seen for miles. Wildfires can occur at any time of the year, but mostly occur during long, dry hot spells. Any small fire in a wooded area, if not quickly detected and suppressed, can get out of control. Most wildfires are caused by human carelessness, negligence, and ignorance. However, some are precipitated by lightning strikes and in rare instances, spontaneous combustion. Wildfires in Pennsylvania can occur in fields, grass, brush, and forests. 98% of wildfires in Pennsylvania are a direct result of people, often caused by debris burns (PA DCNR, 1999).



MITIGATION ACTIONS FOR RESIDENTS

- ▶ **Personal Preparedness** – It is important to plan for disasters. Families may not be together or at home. Consider completing the following to be prepared.
 - **Family Emergency Communication Plan** (FEMA) serves as a comprehensive checklist for household disaster preparedness. [FEMA Family Emergency Communication Plan Checklist](#)
 - **Family Disaster Plan** (American Red Cross) – Communication networks and electricity could be disrupted. Planning in advance will help ensure that all the members of your household know how to reach each other and where to meet up in an emergency. [American Red Cross Family Disaster Plan Template](#)
 - **Emergency Kits** – It is always a good idea to have an emergency kit on hand. Consider basic items as well as special needs.
 Build a Kit (Ready.gov) [ready.gov Build-a-Kit](#)
 Survival Kit Supplies (American Red Cross) [American Red Cross Survival Kit Supplies Checklist](#)
- ▶ **Emergency Alerts and Warnings** – To receive emergency alerts and warnings, refer to the following websites, mobile apps, and other resources.
 - **American Red Cross Mobile Apps** (Apple App Store, Google Play, or text to “90999”
[Mobile Apps - The American Red Cross](#)
 - **South Central Alert** – This service allows residents and businesses in an eight county area to be notified of an emergency situation and important alert messages in a variety of ways, including on their cell phones, home and work phones, by text messaging and e-mail.
[South Central Alert - Sign Up](#)
 - Monitor police news feeds, weather, and news on social media or websites. Receiving periodic updates is vital.
- ▶ **Smoke/Fire Detectors and Sprinklers** – Citizens can install and maintain smoke detectors and fire extinguishers on each floor of their homes or other buildings. This equipment should be tested and/or inspected regularly, and smoke detector batteries should be changed twice a year.

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Everyone in a household or building can be taught how to use a fire extinguisher. Other valuable fire mitigation systems include interior and exterior sprinkler systems.

- ▶ **Defensible Space** – Damage potential can be reduced by ensuring that structures are surrounded by defensible space or buffer zones. Buffer zones are manageable areas, generally 30 to 100 feet and cleared of combustible materials.
- ▶ **Building Foundations** – In wildfire prone areas, risk may be decreased by enclosing the foundations of homes and other buildings, rather than leaving them open where undersides can be exposed to blown embers or other materials.



MITIGATION ACTIONS FOR MUNICIPALITIES

- ▶ **Adopt the York County Hazard Mitigation Plan** by resolution or develop and implement a municipal hazard mitigation plan. [York County Hazard Mitigation Plan](#)
- ▶ **Prepare a Continuity of Operations Plan** to ensure that essential functions continue to be performed under a broad range of circumstances, protecting residents and minimizing business interruption. Consider what capital improvements are needed to adequately protect business or properties. [FEMA Continuity of Operations Brochure](#)
- ▶ **Prepare an Emergency Operations Plan** which describe who will do what, as well as when, with what resources, and by what authority – before, during, and immediately after an emergency. [FEMA Guide for All Hazards Emergency Operations Planning Guide](#)
- ▶ **Coordination** – Develop pre-disaster Memorandums of Agreements or Memorandum of Understanding with adjacent jurisdictions. Build partnerships (neighborhoods, emergency management/first responders, businesses, utility service providers, and local government agencies to strengthen response and recovery.
- ▶ **Public Education and Outreach** – Educate residents regarding risk and impact of hazards, how to prepare and protect themselves and their property. Facilitate funding for mitigation measures and technical assistance programs that address measures that citizens can take. Public education can include promoting such items as noncombustible roof covering, fire safe construction, and the importance of clearing brush and grass away from buildings. Public education on smoking hazards and the risks of recreational fires.
- ▶ **Zoning Regulations** – Zoning can be used to cluster development into defensible areas and keep development away from fire hazards such as steep slopes, where fires are difficult to contain. It is important to note that hillsides facing south or west are more vulnerable to increased dryness and heat from sun exposure. Structures should be set back from slopes outside of the "convection cone" of intense heat that is projected up the slope of a hill as a wildfire "climbs" it. Additional considerations include development density, emergency access, landscaping, and water supply.

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- ▶ **GIS Mapping** – GIS mapping of vegetative coverage can facilitate analysis and planning decisions through comparison with topography, zoning, developments, infrastructure, or other markers.
- ▶ **Building Codes** – Building codes can be used to require upgrades to existing as well as new structures. Encouraging or requiring fire-resistant construction.
- ▶ **Burning Restrictions** – Local ordinances can require burn permits and restrict campfires and outdoor burning.