

# CalFire: Create defensible space before a fire occurs

**Publisher's note:** *This is the first of three articles from the Amador-El Dorado Unit of CalFire regarding the "Ready-Set-Go!" fire and life safety campaign.*

**By Teri Mizuhara**

CAMINO – Unit Chief Kelly Keenan believes living in the Sierra Nevada foothills is a dream come true but with that dream comes a responsibility that many urban/suburban dwellers do not face. Fire is a natural part of our ecosystem. It helps clear out the weeds and brush and creates a healthy forest dynamic.

But with so many homes scattered throughout the rural foothills, naturally occurring fire is not allowed to do what it should because fire agencies must suppress fires that threaten lives and property. So people must do their part and create a space around their homes where fire can be better controlled as it approaches.



Defensible space is critical to being fire safe.

Photo/CalFire

Creating a buffer zone between your home and the wildland greatly reduces the risk of your home catching on fire from radiant heat or flying embers. These embers can destroy homes and even entire neighborhoods that are far from the actual flame front of a wildfire.

**Keys to creating defensible space are:**

**Zone One** extends up to 30 feet (or your property line whichever is closer) from every structure on your property

- Remove all dead and dying vegetation
- Remove leaf litter from your roof and rain gutters
- Relocate woodpiles well away from your home
- Trim trees so they are a minimum of 10 feet from your chimney and roof line
- Remove ladder fuels (low-level vegetation that could allow fire to spread from the ground to shrubs and bushes to the tree canopies).

**Zone Two** extends from 30 feet to 100 feet (or to your property line whichever is closer)

- The key is to keep plant material separated from each other horizontally and vertically, this prevents the vegetation from acting like a ladder and allowing the fire to move from the ground to the tree canopies
- Cut annual grasses down to a maximum of 4 inches in height.

**Preparing and practicing** your family's disaster plan is also key to being ready for fire season. This plan can make evacuating ahead of a

**CalFire beginning Monday is increasing staffing for the fire season on the South Shore and the Northern California counties of El Dorado, Placer, Amador, Nevada, Yuba,**

wildfire or other disaster far less stressful. **Tuolumne, Calaveras, Stanislaus, San Joaquin, Butte and Glenn.** Creating a "Family Disaster Plan" is the first step in preparing for a disaster. It is important every member of your family understands what to do in the event of a wildfire in your area. Practice this plan on a regular basis so each member of your family knows their role and what they need to do; keep a copy of this written plan in an accessible place so that you can refer to it quickly and easily.

"Things to include in the plan are: meeting locations away from your home, communication plans and evacuation plans for your family and your pets. Identify where your gas, water and electrical shut-offs are and how to use them. Plan several evacuation routes in your neighborhood and drive them so you are familiar with them day or night. Assemble emergency supply kits and have them ready for yourself, family and animals. Don't forget to include a portable radio and/or scanner so you can stay updated," Keenan says.

Finally, take steps to make your home more fire resistant; if you are building a new home or renovating your home, consider these fire resistive measures (hardening your home):

- Roofs are the most vulnerable surface on your house. Make sure your roof is made out of "class A" materials, such as composition, metal or tiles.
- Rain gutters should be screened or enclosed to prevent accumulation of plant debris that can catch on fire from a flying ember during a wildfire.
- Exterior walls of your home should be made of ignition resistant materials such as cement siding, stucco or fire retardant treated wood.
- Windows should be double paned with one of the panes made of

tempered glass which will reduce the potential of the heat from a wildfire breaking the window and catching the interior of the house on fire.

- If your home is dependent on a well for water, install a backup generator so you have water in case the electricity goes out.

The following areas of your home should be checked annually and maintained as needed:

- Check that your chimney has an approved spark arrestor (screen) in good condition covering the opening. The screen should have openings no smaller than three-eighth inch and no larger than a half inch.

- Keep the area under your deck or balcony free of combustible material. Never store your firewood under your deck.

- Consider having multiple garden hoses that are long enough to reach any area of your home and any structure on your property.

Keenan adds, "Wind driven embers can fly up to one mile during a wildland fire so 'hardening' your home with fire resistive material, creating a solid buffer zone of defensible space and preparing and practicing your Family Disaster Plan are critical. Being ready for wildfire season is your best defense. Preplanning for a disaster can save your life and the lives of the ones you love."

For more detailed information, go online or call (530) 644.2345 to receive a free brochure.