

Opinion: Do fire shelters save lives?

By **Fernanda Santos**, *New York Times*

Carrying a fire shelter has been mandatory for anyone fighting a wildfire in the United States since 1977. But in Canada, where a raging fire is threatening to destroy the entire city of Fort McMurray, Alberta, firefighters stopped carrying shelters in 2005. Do Canadians know something Americans don't?

Wildfires are an ever-present threat to both America and Canada, and they burn similarly on both sides of the border: hot, big and tough-to-tame beasts. It's where they burn that's different: In the United States, there are more often homes and people close to the flames.

That means Canadian firefighters may have time to think and strategize, while American firefighters have to take more risk as they rush – risk the shelters can help mitigate. In Canada, where fires often burn in densely forested areas, it can also be much harder to find a clearing or local road where it is safe to deploy shelters, which are not built to withstand direct contact with flames.

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