



Twelve Guidelines for Protecting Your Home from Wildfires



As part of our Wildfire Safety and Preparedness Program in California, ACE Private Risk Services has fire safety experts visit homes in high risk locations to look for 12 key safety characteristics. The characteristics fall into three categories — creating a defensible space, replacing or reducing flammable vegetation, and making the home fire resistant.

Homes meeting these 12 guidelines have proven better at resisting damage from wildfires, often without the need for spraying and other last-minute measures, making it easier for families to focus on evacuating safely.

How well does your home measure up?

Shown below are the percentages of homes that met the guidelines when our experts visited. Check each of the guidelines to assess how well your home is prepared to survive a wildfire.

Defensible space – 22% average compliance among homes visited

Your Home

- 1. **Tree branches 10 feet from walls, siding, or decks – 6%**
 - Prune tree branches at least 10 feet from your home structure.
 - Helps prevent a fire from leading to your home
 - Gives firefighters ample space to combat a fire
 - Keeps the temperature of your home at a safer level, preventing windows from breaking or a reduction of the structure’s integrity

- 2. **Tree limbs six feet off the ground on trees over 12 feet tall – 24%**
 - Trim lower branches below six feet off the ground.
 - Plant short, succulent plants near the home; let height increase with distance from home.
 - Helps reduce what is known as a “fire ladder,” which occurs when dense vegetation in a particular area enables the fire to grow in height toward the home

- 3. **Trees and shrubs with proper vertical clearance – 23%**
 - When shrubs grow under trees, trim the tops of shrubs and the bottom branches of trees so that the distance between each is three times the height of the shrubs.
 - Helps prevent a fire from jumping from shrub to tree.

- 4. **Trees and shrubs with proper horizontal clearance – 34%**
 - Space shrubs at least twice as far apart as they are high on flat or mild slopes; double the distance on steeper slopes.
 - Space trees so that crowns are up to 18 feet apart, depending on their proximity to the home; double the distance on steeper slopes.
 - Limits fire from spreading from one tree or shrub to the next by interrupting it’s natural path
 - Creates safe passageways

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Twelve Guidelines for Protecting Your Home from Wildfires (cont'd)

Reducing or removing vegetation – 74% average compliance

Your Home

5. **Trees and shrubs free of all dead and dying foliage – 48%**
 - Keep trees and shrubs well maintained; fire spreads more quickly through dead vegetation.
6. **No loose surface litter around the home – 82%**
 - Have litter removed to deny a fire the benefit of dangerous fuel near your home.
7. **All grasses no more than four inches high – 91%**
 - Keep grass no more than four inches high to slow the spread of fire.
 - Fire embers can easily ignite dry grass and spread quickly to shrubs and trees.
 - Additionally, keep lawns, shrubs and bushes green to block or slow the spread of fire.

Improving the fire resistance of the home – 18% average compliance

8. **Flame- and ember-resistant vent covers – 0%**
 - Install vent covers that allow airflow but restrict flame and ember intrusion through exterior openings leading to the attic, sub-floor, and other areas of your home.
 - Many homes catch fire from embers that enter through these types of openings.
9. **Fire-resistant (intumescent) paint on all exterior walls – 2%**
 - Have the exterior of your home coated with intumescent paint, a water-based and non-toxic latex paint that forms a fire-insulating barrier.
 - Easily applied to any surface, it can dramatically slow the rate of temperature increase, preventing fire penetration for up to two hours.
 - It can also reduce the smoke generated.
10. **Combustible materials 30 feet away from structure or stored inside – 21%**
 - Store combustible materials a safe distance from your home to help prevent the home from igniting and preserve it's structural integrity by keeping it at a safer temperature.
11. **No open voids on the roof, under the garage, and around windows – 34%**
 - Fill voids by having broken tiles on the roof replaced, mud stops installed on ends of clay tiles, fire-resistant weather stripping placed in key areas under the garage, and fire-retardant caulk applied around windows.
 - Fires in void spaces can be difficult to locate and access, making them hard to extinguish.
 - When firefighters cannot track a fire inside a wall cavity, they often open up the wall with an axe to reach the fire.
12. **Seismic gas shut-off valve – 32%**
 - Install a seismic shut-off valve to automatically stop gas flow when an earthquake or wildfire strikes the residence, greatly reducing the risk of fire or explosion from leaks.