

Now is the Time to Prepare for Wildfire Season

Phil Goode, Mayor, City of Prescott

It is time to start thinking about wildfire season in our area. With the late spring and early summer months comes generally drier weather, and the increased wildfire threat. Wildfire is the greatest natural disaster threat our community faces. We need to prepare our homes and businesses, and we also need to know how to respond in the event of a fire. That includes getting emergency information from a credible source. The City and area cooperators are preparing for peak wildfire season, but please remember that wildfire preparedness starts with you.

Protect your home by improving its safety or “hardening” against the threat of falling embers. Eighty percent of the homes destroyed in a wildfire are from the embers landing on and near the home. Make sure your roof is clear of debris like pine needles and leaves. Clean out rain gutters, and remove any combustible materials within five feet of your home. This includes bushes, tree branches, stacked wood, lumber and mulch. Inspect the gable vents on your house. If you have mesh screens behind the vents that are ¼", you can install 1/8" mesh screens which help prevent embers from entering your attic. Mature trees on your property should have their lower branches removed to a height of six feet. Canopies between trees should have gaps of 10 to 15 feet if they are within 30 feet of your house.

The City of Prescott's Forestry Crew will come and chip up any branches you cut. They perform chipping on Fridays and the service is free to Prescott homeowners removing vegetation around their home. The City also provides free dumping of vegetation at the City of Prescott Transfer Station every Saturday in April. That can help get rid of materials that the crew will not be able to chip, such as leaves, pine needles, cacti, or root balls. More guidance on defensible space improvements can be found at prescottfire.org. Here you can also request an on-site visit from our Wildfire Risk Manager for even more help.

Another way to be prepared is to be ready for power outages. Our energy provider, APS, works with emergency managers, first responders and firefighters in our community to help prevent, reduce and respond to wildfires. One tool APS may implement this summer is a Public Safety Power Shutoff (or PSPS). Public Safety Power Shutoffs are only to be used in severe fire conditions and would impact a limited number of residents in high-fire-risk communities. If fire-risk conditions increase to the level where a PSPS might be necessary, APS will provide advance notification to impacted customers. APS encourages customers to make sure their account information on aps.com/login is up to date to receive alerts.

Prepare your home with flashlights, non-perishable foods, and have a backup power source for sensitive medications and other perishables. Go to yavapaiaz.gov/ready for more information and to sign up for our county's emergency alert system. Here you will also find tips on preparing for a power outage, and how to stay up to date on PSPS outages.

Finally, it is critical that citizens get early and accurate information on fires and evacuations. Register with the County at AlertYAVAPAI for notifications. Additionally, install the Genasys Protect app on your phone or mobile devices. This is a relatively new system that the City and the County use for managing evacuation notification. This is interactive, so you can look at a map and know which areas are being evacuated and get information on Red Cross centers and animal shelters. Please use trusted sources like these as social media can snowball with distorted or inaccurate information. Have a "go bag" ready in case you have to evacuate, and make sure you have a plan for your pets.

Prepare for the upcoming fire season now, and don't wait until the last minute. Please join your neighbors and invest in our community's safety. Thanks to Wildfire Risk Manager Conrad Jackson for his contributions to this letter.