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NATURAL RESOURCES

FIRE IN THE GORGE

Photo: unsplash

Homeowners insurance up in flames

BY NOAH NOTEBOOM
AND NATHAN WILSON
Columbia Gorge News

THE GORGE — "The last six months have been the most stressful in my life," said Sue Kusch, who lives in Snowden. "What I've realized is that insurance companies aren't in the business of helping people. It's a risk management industry, so their bottom line is their profits."

After 15 years with American Modern and only one claim, the company canceled her home insurance earlier this year due to wildfire risk, even though Kusch and her partner, both retired, had logged over 40 trees, installed a metal roof and taken other actions to protect their property. Scrambling, Kusch only found two insurers that would cover their manufactured home, and now has a premium nearly double what they previously paid.

From 2019 through 2024, the average homeowner's insurance rate offered by the 10 largest state and national companies in both Oregon and Washington rose by about 52%, according to S&P Global Market Intelligence. Longer and more severe wildfire seasons undergird this increase.

Living on a fixed income, Kusch worries about how any additional rate hikes will impact their retirement. The two have already considered relocating as a result, but wonder if buyers will bite if the insurance market becomes any more inaccessible or expensive.

"I never thought that I wouldn't be able to sell my place," said Kusch, noting her neighbors across the road have struggled to find takers.

Ethelene Gardner's situation is similar. Out east in Goldendale, she's logged 22 acres of trees and trimmed ladder fuels on her remaining 40 or so acres. Gardner also received a cancellation notice from American Modern in March, and since then, she hasn't found a policy for less than $3,000 a year from 12 different companies, let alone convince a representative to inspect her property.

"If there's a problem, tell us what to correct. If we don't want to correct it, that's on us — but there's nothing to correct," said Gardner. "They just point blank say no."

She and her husband, who's losing his eyesight, live solely off Social Security for their income, and Gardner also cares for her mother-in-law with late-stage cancer. She can't afford the premiums that companies are demanding, so she's considering opting for a cheaper policy that wouldn't completely cover her assets, like the belongings in her home and garages.

"I've got a decision to make, even if it's a bad one, just to get some type of insurance," said Gardner.

Adam Berglund and his wife had to go through 14 companies before finding one that would cover their newly constructed, fire-resistant home near White Salmon. Their premium rose over $2,000 this past year, and 10 additional companies couldn't offer anything cheaper.

"We just built our home and moved in less than a month ago, and are already concerned about our ability to retain and afford the required insurance," said Berglund.

A resident of The Dalles said their premium jumped 30% this year. Another person living in Mosier now pays an extra $200 monthly for home insurance, and a different Mosier resident saw a 50% increase in their premium. One person in Underwood said their rate rose $2,000 over the past five years.

While a small sample and not representative of the entire Mid-Columbia region, 43 of 56 people who responded to a survey distributed by *Columbia Gorge News* reported that an insurance company has either recently canceled their policy or increased their premium. Participants ranged from Washougal and Goldendale to Parkdale and Wamic.

Volatile markets, little recourse

"A nuclear bomb went off inside the insurance industry," said Keith Howell, an agent with Country Financial in Hood River, and a combination of wildfire seasons ignited it.

After the Carlton Complex fires decimated 353 homes in 2014 and over 1 million acres burned throughout Washington the following year, the *Seattle Times* discovered that complaints about wildfire risk informing underwriting decisions started flowing to the state Office of Insurance Commissioner in 2016. Then came the 2020 Labor Day fires, which were unprecedented for several reasons.

That summer, wildfires burned in typically less susceptible areas, scorching as much forest on the western, wetter side of the Cascades in just two weeks than had burned in the previous five decades. In total, nearly 2 million acres burned across Oregon and Washington, a threshold surpassed only once since the National Interagency Coordination Center began collecting the data in 2006.

With over 4,000 homes destroyed between both states and an estimated $1 to $3 billion worth of insured losses, according to a leading catastrophe risk solutions firm, that rattled providers alongside previous and continued billion-dollar disasters throughout the country.

As companies gradually adjusted their internal models, Howell began seeing widespread cancellations and rate increases in the Gorge three years ago. In tandem with wildfires and a growing number of claims, Howell said rising inflation has caused "chaos in the insurance industry."

Jon Davies, principal agent with Columbia River Insurance, has been in the industry for nearly 30 years and said there are different "rating variables" that insurance companies take into consideration when determining coverage options.

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He highlighted several: the value of the house, when the house was built, how old it is, how old the roof is, how old the plumbing and electrical systems are, when the last time the house was updated, the person's credit history, the house history and the previous claims related to that home.

"There are probably between 50 and 100 different rating variables, the largest one really being the wildfire mapping score," Davies said. "Insurance companies use their own proprietary wildfire mapping."

Following the devastating 2020 fires, legislators passed a bill in 2021 directing Oregon's Department of Forestry to create a wildfire hazard map, intended to build awareness for residents and identify areas around the state that are at higher risk for wildfires. In April 2023, Oregon ratified another law — Senate Bill 82 — that prohibited insurance providers from using the map to cancel, decline to renew or increase premiums. After rolling the first version back and under continued criticism from residents, Oregon's Senate recently voted to repeal the map altogether.

A 2018 law charged Washington's Department of Natural Resources (DNR) with producing a similar map to complement new building codes for the wildland urban interface. Like in Oregon, the map has undergone multiple revisions and DNR has yet to release the final version. Washington law requires insurers to provide "reasonable explanations" for any premium increase upon request, but the state has no guardrails to prevent companies from using state wildfire risk data to influence policies, according to the *Seattle Times*.

Multiple independent agents affirmed that insurance companies use their own third-party sources to determine a property's wildfire score. Certain insurers, though, are more or less strict depending on their rating system.

In 2023, for example, Progressive scored a property on York Hill in Hood River using a scale from 1 to 50. Homes that are given a score from 1 to 28 are eligible for coverage. The York Hill home scored a 29 and was deemed ineligible for coverage.

Tatyana Onar-Smith, principal agent for Alan-White Insurance in Hood River, said Progressive was not interested in covering the home and refused to negotiate. According to the notice of nonrenewal document provided by Progressive and given to the homeowner, "any mitigation actions you take will unlikely change the wildfire risk score."

"How is a consumer supposed to change a third-party score, then?" said Onar-Smith in frustration.

"In Oregon, as a regulator, insurance companies don't have to get our approval to make a rate increase," Andrew Stolfi, the state insurance commissioner, said in an interview with *Oregon Public Broadcasting*. "Our pre-approval authority is limited to health insurance and long-term care insurance premium changes."

Professional risk assessors with Oregon's Department of Consumer and Business Services review requests to raise premiums after they're already implemented. If the increase is unfairly discriminatory or lacks necessary evidence, they have the authority to request changes from insurers. Oregon law, however, does not prohibit companies from canceling policies or not covering properties due to wildfire risk, according to the *Oregon Capital Chronicle*.

Washington's Office of Insurance Commissioner, by contrast, has prior approval power, but the agency has signed off on drastic rate increases for homeowners insurance over the past several years. In the first half of 2024, based on a KING 5 investigation, the office received more wildfire-related complaints of people being dropped than the previous two years combined. Neither Oregon nor Washington tracks the number of uninsured people in each state.

"I've always been able to find something. Now that's not a given at all. There's houses out there we just simply can't get insurance for, which is really discouraging," Davies said.

Other options and strategies

If you're unable to find insurance, consult with a local agent. Davies, Howell and Onar-Smith said that Oregon's FAIR plan serves as a last resort, but it only covers up to $600,000, and payouts could be low as more homeowners are being dropped from private carriers, increasing demand. Washington also has a FAIR Plan with a maximum coverage of $1.5 million, but KING 5 found that the number of people depending on that option has jumped 200% in the last five years.

Davies further cautioned against filing small claims easily covered by your savings because, regardless of size, any claim affects your chances of getting insured for a certain period.

"The insurance companies] all share resources, and so all claims are reported to a central database," he said. "Those claims follow you, and the state allows the carriers to rate and surcharge you for claims that are up to five years old."

"Carriers — in a lot of cases — are looking for excuses to cancel policies," Davies added.

The Oregon Division of Financial Regulation (DRF) has resources for every homeowner, including a Home Insurance Shopping Tool (dfr.oregon.gov/insure/home/Documents/6014-home-insurance-shopping-tool.pdf). This form gives homeowners the opportunity to compare coverages based on quotes from carriers. The DFR also advises customers to verify the insurance carrier's license.

The Washington State Office of the Insurance Commissioner also has various resources for residents seeking insurance. Their 14-page Consumer's Guide to Homeowner Insurance (www.insurance.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2025-03/homeowner-insurance-guide.pdf) provides information on types of coverage, how their office reviews homeowner rates, tips while shopping for coverage and what to do in the event of an emergency.

Bundling could save you money as well. A Mosier resident explained to *Columbia Gorge News* that State Farm threatened to increase his property premium from $1,800 to $3,800 this year, but by combining his home and auto, he's only doling out about $2,600 annually and reduced his total cost. Protecting your property from wildfire risk is also a worthy investment, even though multiple agents confirmed it may not result in a discount.

Dawn Rasmussen and her husband only saw a modest rate hike this year, but that isn't stopping them from reducing fuels and improving the chances that, should a wildfire consume Sevenmile Hill west of The Dalles, firefighters can make a stand on their property. Soon, they'll have a 5,000 gallon water tank with hoses, and the couple already installed a roof sprinkler system, solar panels and joined a Firewise program (see related story on page 3).

"In order to help first responders, we have to engage in some self-reliance work," said Rasmussen. "If they're going to come to our house and try to save it, then they need to be safe too."

Understanding that home ignition isn't a fire problem, but rather a fuel problem, the two removed all combustible material within 10 feet of their home, trimmed back vegetation within 30 feet and cleared additional fuels 100 feet out to create a defensible space. While fuel reduction work can be time-consuming and costly, there's state and local opportunities available.

The Hood River Soil and Water Conservation District offers free chipping services for those engaged in defensible space work during spring. If you're interested in future chipping services, email cheryl@hoodriverswcd.org or call 541-386-4588. In both Hood River County and South Wasco County, the Natural Resources and Conservation Service has funding for fuel reduction through the Parkdale Service Center (541-352-1037) and The Dalles Service Center (541-298-8559). Oregon's Department of Forestry also administers grants in Hood River County, which you can learn more about by calling 541-296-4626, and Wasco County has funding for identified areas through its Community Wildfire Defense Project.

Likewise, Washington's Department of Natural Resources offers financial assistance to small forestland owners for improving wildfire resilience, covering anywhere from half to the whole cost of an approved project. Find more details by visiting www.dnr.wa.gov/cost-share, and if you live in Klickitat or Skamania counties, email dnrreseloa@dnr.wa.gov or call 509-925-8510 to apply.

A roadmap for Firewise certification

BY NATHAN WILSON
Columbia Gorge News

THE GORGE — With home insurance on the rise and a diminished federal firefighting force (see related story on page 5), now's the time to engage in community-based wildfire resilience, and beginning the Firewise certification process is a very proactive way to get started.

A countrywide program administered by the National Fire Protection Association, Firewire USA provides a framework for grassroots mobilization around wildfire risk. Through local experts and volunteer hours with your neighbors, the program can support communities ranging from 8 to 2,500 homes in pinpointing key mitigation strategies and bringing them to fruition.

"The Firewise USA process is always something that helps the community organize behind wildfire risk and move towards that implementation phase in a more organized process than if it was just an individual landowner doing it here and there," said Charlie Landsman, community fire resilience coordinator for Washington's Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

Landsman went on to explain the five requirements that communities must fulfill to obtain and keep a Firewise certification. The first step is getting in touch with the appropriate state liaison. On the Washington side, that's Landsman, who you can reach at charles.landsman@dnr.wa.gov or 360-972-4249. Oregon's Department of Forestry The Dalles Unit Office, available at 541-296-4626, handles Firewise across the river.

Once in contact, interested neighborhoods must form a board or committee responsible for overseeing the program. These are folks willing and available to serve in leadership roles and act as a program point of contact. The second requirement is drafting a community wildfire risk assessment.

Guided by the liaison, the document addresses important variables such as building materials, defensible space around homes, historical fire patterns, evacuation routes and more, followed by a three-year action plan crafted by the board that prioritizes projects to reduce ignition risk to homes. Oregon and Washington have distinct guidelines for the risk assessment, which must be updated at least every five years.

Then comes doing the work as outlined. Firewise communities must complete one hour of volunteer work for each home within its boundary annually. The last requirement is hosting an event, like an educational presentation about wildfire from a local conservation district each year. Once all those boxes are checked, the committee leader can apply for recognition at portal.firewise.org.

There are now eight Firewise communities in Hood River County, and two in Wasco County.

"As far as assembling a common picture of risk and how to mitigate it, once everyone in the community is working together to reduce that, the sky's the limit," said Simone Cordery-Cotter, fire risk reduction specialist for the Oregon State Fire Marshall. "Being a Firewise community can also look very positive on grant applications, whether that's federal or state grant applications, and depending on funding, it can actually unlock additional funding for communities."

In Washington, for example, DNR facilitates a Firewise USA Site Micro Grant that provides communities a maximum of $4,000 to support projects identified in their action plans.

"We know that this program is in demand and that residents are hungry to take charge of their own risk and manage it," said Cordery-Cotter. "To me, that signals that fire districts and local governments need to invest in supporting these community members."

How Pacific Power is using weather forecasts and Artificial Intelligence to mitigate wildfire hazards

BY NOAH NOTEBOOM
Columbia Gorge News

THE GORGE — Last month, representatives with Pacific Power came to Hood River and talked about how the regional utility company is preparing for wildfire season in the Gorge. Chester Lampkin, Pacific Power senior meteorologist; and Simon Gutierrez, senior communications specialist, spoke about PacifiCorp's approach to predict and mitigate wildfire risks across Oregon.

"We're required to file a wildfire mitigation plan with the state of Oregon every year, and that plan includes our best practice approach ... preventing wildfire starts. Safety is the top priority for this company," Gutierrez said. Pacific Power serves 243 communities across Oregon, Washington and northern California and the utilty they released their 2025 Wildfire Mitigation Plan (WMP) on May 1.

Lampkin has worked as a meteorologist for over a decade and said his job centers around weather forecasts and the science behind wildfires.

"Our job is focused on fire 365 days a year," Lampkin said. "When we're not in fire season, we are preparing for fire season. We're trying to become better forecasters, better meteorologists."

Each year, they evaluate where the utility company can improve their weather modeling. Lampkin says this year they received an upgrade to their modeling system that is specific to the western United States and covers every square inch of Oregon. This system takes temperature, wind, humidity and moisture levels into account.

Lampkin says they pay close attention the amount of moisture, particularly in live and dead fuels. Live fuels are considered trees and vegetation that are alive, versus dead fuels which include grasslands and dry vegetation.

"We look at the moisture of dead fuels — a lot of people don't realize that there is still moisture in a lot of these dead fuels — and the more moisture there is, the less likely fire is to erupt," Lampkin said. "Conversely, we also look at live fuel moistures, which is one of the more difficult things to quantify, because you can't go to every single tree in a forest and measure the moisture, so you have to use certain benchmarks."

Lampkin says Pacific Power uses information and data from the National Forest Service (NFS). The NFS collects samples from trees and vegetation and "cooks" them to measure the amount of moisture extruded from the sample.

Pacific Power utilizes software called Wildfire Analyst from Technosylva which uses Artificial Intelligence (AI) and historical data from the past 30 years to predict wildfire behavior.

"It uses our weather variables. It has its own fire modeling, and you can actually plot a fire down anywhere you want in the domain, and you can simulate the fire behavior," Lampkin said. "This is the same vendor who also helps us run our high resolution weather model. So again, these are two different things, weather model, fire model, but we can combine them in order to create a sort of a holistic look."

Pacific Power's daily risk forecast helps guide operations for grounds and maintenance crews and assists emergency management teams with the most accurate and up-to-date wildfire information. These forecasts sometimes stretch out months in advance, but are most important when a fire starts.

When a fire is reported, Lampkin and his team assess the weather conditions and communicate with other Pacific Power representatives in case they need to conduct a Public Safety Power Shutoff, or PSPS. This is part of their larger strategy to determine if weather conditions or dry vegetation pose a threat. According to resource guides on the Pacific Power website: "The decision to implement a PSPS is based on extreme weather and area conditions, including high wind speeds, low humidity and critically dry fuels, and incorporates input from local public safety partners."

An emergency de-energization occurs when fire presents an immediate threat to equipment. In 2024, Oregon had the most emergency de-energizations among California, Washington, Idaho, Utah and Wyoming. Power outages may be frequent and vary in duration depending on the fire's behavior. De-energizations pose a threat to residents who have in-home medical equipment that requires electricity. Pacific Power offers rebates up to $4,000 for eligible customers who wish to purchase qualifying products such as backup generators or power stations. To learn more, visit www.pacificpower.net/outages-safety/storm-emergency-preparedness/backup-generators.html.

Guiterrez said that they want to avoid emergency de-energizations and Pacific Power hopes by creating a new emergency response team, that can be a reality.

Pacific Power is working to establish a Wildfire Intelligence Center in Medford, Oregon that will eventually provide 24/7 surveillance of potential hazards that threaten Pacific Power assets. According to Pacific Power's WMP staff at the soon-to-be intelligence center will oversee the six-state service area to determine a course of action that could avoid an emergency de-energization.

You can prepare your home for wildfires and emergency de-energizations by creating an emergency plan with enough supplies, learn the advantages of owning a generator (you may be eligible for a rebate) and understand what resources you qualify for if you have medical equipment reliant on electricity. Read more about power outages and wildfire safety at www.pacificpower.net/outages-safety/wildfire-safety.html.

SIGNING UP FOR EMERGENCY ALERTS.

Signing up for emergency alerts is a strong first step to take in being prepared for emergencies.
Visit these websites in Oregon and Washington to sign up.
You can tailor what kind of alerts you get, and how you get them — such as by email, text or phone call to your landlineor cellphone.

IN OREGON:
For Wasco County:
member.ever- bridge.net/453003085612392/login
Individuals who need assistance can register by calling the Wasco County Communications Manager at 541-506-2760.
For Hood River County:
hoodriversheriff.com/events/emergency-alerts

IN WASHINGTON:
For Klickitat County:
www.smart911.com/smart911/ref/login.action?pa=klickitatco

For Skamania County:
signup.hyper-reach.com/hyper _reach/sign_up_ page_2/?id=45528

Certified Burner Program

STAFF REPORT-
Columbia Gorge News

The Washington State Legislature granted the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) the authority to establish a certified burner program (CBP) in 2018 when it adopted House Bill 2733.

DNR launched the program in the spring of 2022 to help educate professionals and private citizens gain the knowledge and skills needed to successfully implement prescribed fire on their landscapes. Program Manager Kyle Lapham and recent graduate Lucas King recently participated in a webinar about the program.

The multi-day workshops happen 2-3 times each year in different parts of the state. Instruction include both classroom and field work. More information about upcoming workshops can be found below.

How to Become a Certified Prescribed Burn Manager in Washington State

DNR offers three-day, in-person courses several times each year. Coursework includes four hours of prep work before the class, two days of classroom instruction, a site visit, and a final exam. Topics include fire behavior, smoke management, safety, and more. Participants must have experience leading either pile or broadcast burns. Access to property suitable for prescribed fire is required for certification.

The next step after finishing the course and passing the exam is to draft a burn plan.

Burn plans must include:

- Landowner name and address
- Description of the burn area
- Map of the burn area
- Estimated fuel tonnage per acre
- Objectives of the proposed burn
- Acceptable weather parameters
- Summary of methods to start, control, and extinguish the burn
- Neighbor notifications

Once a burn plan is completed, a prospective certified burner must obtain all necessary burn permits and authorizations from the Washington State Department of Natural Resources. Make sure to notify nearby residents and emergency response agencies about the upcoming burn. The final step is to successfully lead and implement a prescribed fire under observation by the CBP program manager.

Burn leaders will be evaluated using a form, as well as on their burn plan and a map of the burn. Courses are held in different locations throughout Washington. Cost to attend is $100 and does not include travel expenses.

Visit the prescribed fire page for more information about the Washington DNR Prescribed Fire Program.

Upcoming courses

Spring 2025: May 20-22 at Wenatchee Valley College.

Fall 2025: October 28-30 at the Klickitat Community Center.

Certified Burn Manager Program

In 2021, Legislators passed Senate Bill 762, requiring the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) to develop a Certified Burn Manager (CBM) program. The overall goal of this program is to reduce barriers to prescribed fire in Oregon by increasing available resources on non-federal ODF protected lands through a prescribed fire leadership training and certification program. When landowners within ODF protection districts use a certified burn manager and follow the required burn plan, it protects both from civil liability. ODF is seeking applications from individuals interested in becoming CBMs and training providers who have experience with the creation and delivery of wildland fire training to deliver content based upon a detailed CBM instructor guide and final exam provided by ODF.

Initially, while training providers are entering into agreements with ODF and creating content in preparation for delivery based on ODF's CBM instructor guide, only individuals with existing National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) qualifications as a Type 2 Burn Boss (RXB2) or documentation of prior experience leading burns are eligible to apply for historical recognition. For those with experience in prescribed fire seeking to gain knowledge, skills, and abilities in leading burns, the certified burn manager course will be made available through Oregon State University Extension and other training providers in Spring 2024, with specific dates and locations posted here as they are scheduled. Once the certified burn manager course has been completed and a certificate of course completion along with documentation of prior burn experience has been received, a field certification book will be issued by ODF to be completed and submitted for certification as a burn manager.

Certified Burner Program is also available in Oregon. Visit: www.oregon.gov/odf/fire/pages/prescribed-fire.aspx

EVACUATION LEVELS AND THEIR MEANING

When wildfires occur, officials provide varying evacuation instructions to affected areas, depending on the severity of risk. The three levels are: Be Ready; Be Set; and Go Now!

The following is a description of what each level means, as provided by wildfire.oregon.gov.

(Green on a map) LEVEL 1 - BE READY to evacuate.

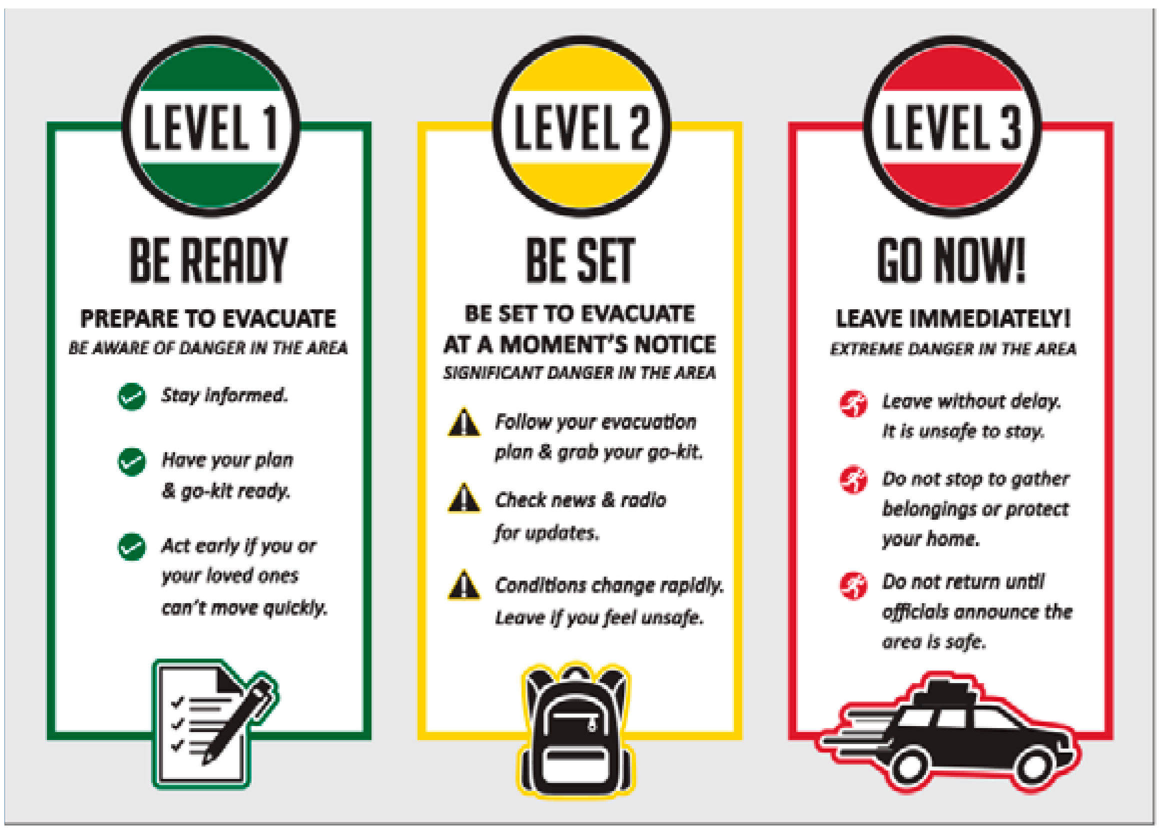
Be aware of danger in the area. Stay informed: Sign up for emergency alerts with your county. Check the county emergency management website and follow local emergency services on social media for updates (county, sheriff's office, fire agencies). Tune in to local news for more information. This is the time to pack and prepare to leave. Have your emergency plan and go-kit ready. Plan possible evacuation routes and transportation needs. Check with loved ones and emergency contacts. If you can do so safely, check with your neighbors, share information and ask for help if needed. Consider leaving early if you or your loved ones can't move quickly and need more time to evacuate, including older adults, families with children, people with disabilities and those with limited access to transportation. Consider moving pets and livestock early.

(Yellow on a map) Level 2 - BE SET to evacuate.

There is significant danger in the area. Be prepared to leave at a moment's notice. Time to act — there may not be enough time to pack your belongings and doing so is at your own risk. Leave if you or your loved ones can't move quickly and need extra time to evacuate. Inform loved ones of your evacuation plans. Be prepared to relocate to a shelter or with family or friends outside of the affected area. Stay informed and be alert. Continue to check the county emergency management website, local emergency services on social media, and local news for updates. Conditions can change rapidly. Leave if you feel unsafe. You don't need to wait for another evacuation notice.

(Red on a map) Level 3 - GO NOW!

Leave immediately! There is extreme danger in the area. It is unsafe to stay and threatens the safety of you, your loved ones and emergency responders. Do not stop to gather belongings or make efforts to protect your home. Emergency responders may not be available to provide help if you choose to stay. Do not return to the area until officials announce the area is safe.



Graphic from wildfire.oregon.gov

As the saying goes, knowledge is power. In an emergency, it can be lifesaving.

The key areas to learn before an emergency are:

Know your risks. What's most likely to happen here? Tornadoes? No. Tsunamis? No. Wildfires and winter snowstorms? Yes. Know when and where to go. Beforehand, decide on several possible destinations in various directions, and share them with your family and friends. When you choose one, share that.

Know what to bring. Build a go bag ahead of time so you're not scrambling (see page 8). Make sure everyone in the house knows where it's stored and who is responsible for it in an emergency.

Know where to get good information. Sign up for alerts from your local emergency management agencies and the National Weather Service, which will provide updates on threat conditions, shelter locations, and other important safety information.

Download the FEMA App where you can receive real-time weather alerts, locate emergency shelters in your area, prepare for common hazards, and more.

Keep your car full of gas, especially if you know evacuation is likely. Keep your tank half full at all times.

If you don't have a car, plan with family and friends how you will leave.

Once you evacuate, close and lock your doors. Leave a note saying where you're going. Unplug small appliances.

Photo: Noah Noteboom

Federal cuts jeopardize PNW wildfire preparedness and response

BY NATHAN WILSON
Columbia Gorge News

THE GORGE — As another potentially severe wildfire season begins, the gutting of land management agencies by President Donald Trump and the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) has jeopardized wildfire preparedness and response in the Pacific Northwest.

During a press conference on May 8, Democratic Sens. Patty Murray of Washington and Oregon's Jeff Merkley, alongside firefighting and forestry leaders from both states, explained the impacts of federal workforce cuts. The United States Forest Service (USFS) fired around 3,400 probationary employees, people typically in their first year or two of a government job, in mid-February under the direction of Trump. Across Oregon and Washington, USFS is down at least 500 heads.

"We hardly know the full scope of the damage because the administration won't share the information," said Murray. "Nearly every single Forest Service employee supports fire operations in some capacity."

According to the National Federation of Federal Employees, a countrywide union, 75% of USFS employees have red cards, meaning they have special training to support frontline firefighting crews. Murray and Merkley said this certification encompasses trail maintenance crews that clear access routes, dispatchers directing response, biologists who inform fuel reduction strategies, cooks, mechanics and more.

Learning directly from people on the ground, Murray noted she's aware of 35 USFS employees fired from Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, 46 at Okanogan-Wenatchee, 21 at Colville, 15 at Gifford Pinchot and an unknown number at the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area.

"Last year in Oregon, wildfires burned a record 1.9 million acres, more than any year ever before," Merkley said earlier in May. "This year's wildfire season is just weeks away, but the Trump administration has left us dangerously underprepared."

Based on models from the National Interagency Coordination Center, this season's temperature and precipitation outlook is very similar to 2024. Eastern Oregon and almost all of Washington will likely have "above average risk for large, costly fires" by July, according to John Saltenberger, the center's lead meteorologist.

As ordered by a quasi-judicial entity called the Merit Systems Protection Board, the Department of Agriculture (USDA), USFS's parent agency, temporarily reinstated nearly 6,000 probationary employees in March. Murray said she knows of several employees who declined the offer due to a lack of stability. As part of an agency reorganization plan mandated by Trump, USDA has yet to announce additional reductions in force that may further erode capacity.

Around 4,000 USFS employees have also opted to resign from their posts nationally, and cuts at other land management agencies range in the thousands. The Department of the Interior, which includes the National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management, has lost nearly 3,000 employees because of terminations and deferred resignations, according to the *New York Times.* Like USDA, it's unclear how many employees have been reinstated, but most who have are on paid administrative leave.

Altogether, the changes and lack of communication from the government have muddled an already complex web of local, state and federal wildfire coordination efforts.

"This is the time when we make certain that we have the aviation we need, when we have the personnel we need and that all of our systems check out and are ready to go when the alarm bell rings," said Washington State Forester George Geissler. "Without knowing what our partners are doing or not having a clear understanding of what actions are being taken, we struggle with missing the third leg of the stool."

Chris Chambers, forest division chief for Ashland Fire & Rescue, reported that nine out of 45 complex incident management teams, groups that respond to the most serious wildfires across the nation, are no longer staffed. Fire Chief Leonard Johnson, with the McLane Black Fire Department near Olympia, wasn't able to quantify the impact on Washington's incident management teams but stressed that state and local resources will ultimately have to fill the gaps.

"When we don't have those interagency relationships and federal resources available, the burden transfers over to fire districts, to the state Department of Natural Resources, in combating fire that is threatening our jurisdictions or is potentially coming into those interface areas around us that normally got higher levels of protection from the federal agencies," said Johnson.

Stretched departments mean slower response times, and apart from land management agencies, cuts to the National Weather Service (NWS) could cause further delays. The NWS office in Pendelton, which forecasts weather for a broad swath of Oregon and Washington east of the Cascades, may soon close overnight because of staffing shortages, according to a report obtained by the *Washington Post.*

"We have a high reliance on them for early recognition of conditions that are developing," said Johnson, explaining how wind reports particularly help departments determine where to position resources. "The less people that work in predictive services has a huge impact on us."

"My call for action is for people not to sit at home and wonder what to do, but to call and let their members of Congress and the administration know we cannot let this continue on," said Murray. "We need to restore the people that allow these programs to work."

For local updates on wildfires, weather conditions, evacuation notices and more during this wildfire season, join the Columbia Gorge Wildland & Fire Information Page on Facebook by visiting www.facebook.com/groups/ColumbiaGorge.WildlandFireInfo/.

Photo: Noah Noteboom

Increased wildfire activity may be a feature of past periods of abrupt climate change

BY MICHELLE KLAMPE
Oregon State University

A new study investigating ancient methane trapped in Antarctic ice suggests that global increases in wildfire activity likely occurred during periods of abrupt climate change throughout the last Ice Age.

The study, just published in the journal *Nature*, reveals increased wildfire activity as a potential feature of these periods of abrupt climate change, which also saw significant shifts in tropical rainfall patterns and temperature fluctuations around the world.

"This study showed that the planet experienced these short, sudden episodes of burning, and they happened at the same time as these other big climate shifts," said Edward Brook, a paleoclimatologist at Oregon State University and a co-author of the study. "This is something new in our data on past climate."

The findings have implications for understanding modern abrupt climate change, said the study's lead author, Ben Riddell-Young, who conducted the research as part of his doctoral studies in OSU's College of Earth, Ocean, and Atmospheric Sciences.

"This research shows that we may not be properly considering how wildfire activity might change as the climate warms and rainfall patterns shift," said Riddell-Young, who is now a postdoctoral scholar at the Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

Ice that built up in Antarctica over tens to hundreds of thousands of years contains ancient air bubbles. Scientists use samples of that ice, collected by drilling cores, to analyze the gases preserved in these bubbles and build records of the Earth's past climate.

Previous research has shown that levels of atmospheric methane, a greenhouse gas, spiked during abrupt climate change periods during the last Ice Age, which ended about 11,000 years ago. These abrupt climate change events, known as Dansgaard-Oeschger and Heinrich events, were associated with rapid regional temperature changes and shifting rainfall patterns, as well as spikes in atmospheric methane. The goal of the study was to try to determine what caused those spikes.

"These spikes were notable because of how quickly the methane levels changed during these periods," Riddell-Young said.

Riddell-Young used samples from the two-mile long Western Antarctic Ice Sheet Divide Ice Core and a replicate core collected with a specialized drill that reenters the core and borehole and collects more ice. The records in those cores date back 67,000 years.

"Because this ice is in a place where the annual snowfall rate is high, the record doesn't go back as far in time as other ice cores, but you get more ice for each year, and you can better see the detail in those years," said Brook, a professor in OSU's College of Earth, Ocean, and Atmospheric Sciences.

Riddell-Young used a system he designed to extract the air from ice samples and then used a mass spectrometer to measure the isotopic composition of the methane, which can indicate the sources of atmospheric methane.

The measured isotopic changes suggest that the spikes in methane were caused by methane emissions from an increase in wildfires globally, Riddell-Young said.

"These fire events were likely one of the cascading impacts resulting from what triggered the abrupt climate change event," he said. "It probably went something like: Ocean currents slowed down or sped up rapidly, the northern hemisphere cooled or warmed rapidly, and then this caused abrupt shifts in tropical rainfall that lead to increased drought and fire."

Past research has suggested that shifts in temperature and tropical rainfall were associated with these abrupt climate change periods, but the new study provides the first good evidence that fire was also a feature of these periods, Brook said.

Additional research is needed to better understand the role these periods of burning may have in climate patterns, Brook said. For example, burning produces atmospheric CO2, another greenhouse gas, which also contributes to climate warming.

"Understanding what this burning really means for the carbon cycle is one of the places the research is headed next," he said.

The research was supported by the National Science Foundation. Additional co-authors are James Lee of the Los Alamos National Laboratory; Jochen Schmitt and Hubertus Fischer of the University of Bern; Thomas Bauska of the British Antarctic Survey; James A. Menking of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization in Australia; René Iseli of the University of Fribourg; and Justin Reid Clark of the University of Colorado, Boulder.

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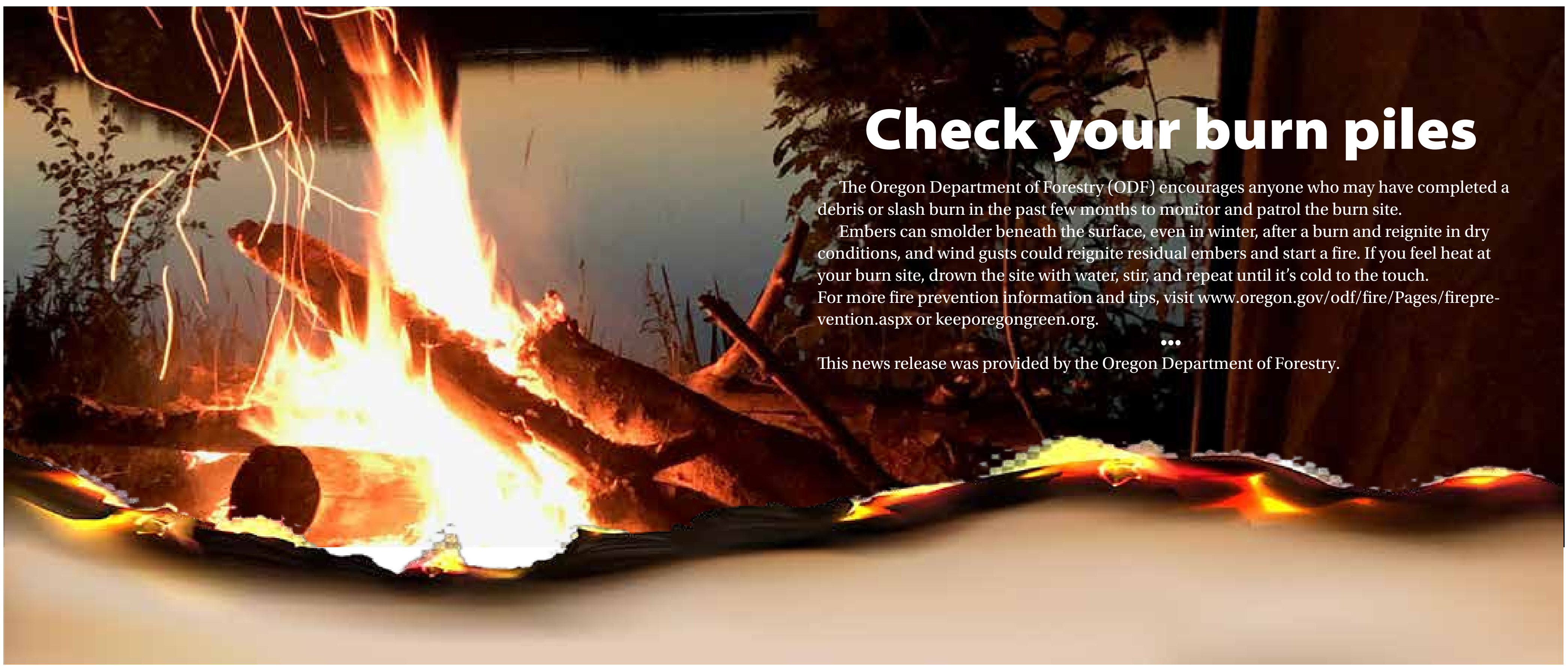
This story was originally published by Oregon State University. Sources: Ben Riddell-Young, Benjamin.riddell-young@noaa.gov; Ed Brook, edward.brook@oregonstate.edu.



Check your burn piles

The Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) encourages anyone who may have completed a debris or slash burn in the past few months to monitor and patrol the burn site.

Embers can smolder beneath the surface, even in winter, after a burn and reignite in dry conditions, and wind gusts could reignite residual embers and start a fire. If you feel heat at your burn site, drown the site with water, stir, and repeat until it's cold to the touch.

For more fire prevention information and tips, visit www.oregon.gov/odf/fire/Pages/fireprevention.aspx or keeporegongreen.org.

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This news release was provided by the Oregon Department of Forestry.

BLM announces fire restrictions

On May 15, fire restrictions went into effect for all Bureau of Land Management public lands throughout Oregon and Washington. BLM leaders encourage all visitors to be aware of active restrictions and closures as warmer, drier weather is forecasted around the Pacific Northwest.

These fire restrictions help reduce the risk of human-caused fires. Starting May 15, the use of fireworks, exploding targets or metallic targets, steel component ammunition (core or jacket), tracer or incendiary devices, and sky lanterns will be prohibited.

"The number of human-caused fires has only increased over the years," said BLM Oregon and Washington State Fire Management Officer Jeff Fedrizzi.

Grasses and other fuels dry out quickly in the summer months, making them highly susceptible to catching fire. It just takes one spark.

"Our first responders, local communities, and public lands will be safer if everyone follows fire restrictions and practices fire safety while out on public lands," he continued.

Those who violate the prohibition may be fined up to $100,000 and/or imprisoned for up to 12 months. In addition, those found responsible for starting wildland fires on federal lands can be billed for the cost of fire suppression.

For the complete order and more information on seasonal fire restrictions and fire closures, see www.blm.gov/orwafire.

May is also "Wildfire Awareness Month." Visit NIFC.GOV for wildfire prevention tips.

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This news release was provided by the Bureau of Land Management, Oregon and Washington.

Photo: Noah Noteboom

Photo: unsplash

Minimizing the chances of sparking a fire

In the past 20 years, humans have accidentally started 81% of the wildfires in Hood River County. These fires often start close to roads, houses, places where we enjoy outdoor activities, and other important areas, creating a big risk. Here are some tips to help avoid accidentally starting a wildfire:

Vehicle safety:

- Avoid driving or parking vehicles over dry vegetation.
- Carry a shovel, bucket and fire extinguisher in your vehicle.
- If you're towing a trailer, ensure the tires are not worn, bearings and axles are greased, brakes are working properly and safety chains are in place and not dragging on the ground.

Equipment and machinery

- Avoid operating machinery on windy days or during red flag warning conditions (red flag warnings are issued when the weather is very hot, dry and windy).
- Maintain equipment to prevent sparks and overheating.
- Store fuel in appropriate containers.

Backyard burning

- Do not burn on windy days.
- Backyard debris burning is not allowed during fire season. Consider alternatives like chipping, composting or recycling yard debris during the summer.
- Keep a water source, shovel and fire extinguisher nearby. Monitor burning piles and keep them from spreading into the surrounding vegetation.
- Fully extinguish fires by drowning the ashes in water and stirring until the pile is cold. Check the site in the following days to ensure burn areas are cold, as residual heat can sometimes be rekindled later.
- Burn permits are required year-round in Hood River County. Contact your local fire district for a permit to burn small backyard debris piles. For larger slash or brush piles associated with a grant or commercial operation, contact Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) in The Dalles.

Campfires

- Select a flat, open location away from flammable vegetation, preferably in a pre-established fire ring or fire-proof container.
- Keep campfires small by using short lengths of wood.
- Do not leave or go to sleep until your campfire is completely extinguished.
- Campfires may be prohibited during periods of high fire danger. When camping, check with the land management agency, such as state parks, ODF, Forest Service or county parks, for fire bans.

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This article was written by Kayla Bordelon, John Punches, Charles Young, Andrew Spaeth, Lauren Kraemer and Rachael Cleveland for OSU Extension.

Your pets *are an important member of your family, so they need to be included in your family's emergency plan. To prepare for the unexpected follow these tips with your pets in mind:*

Make a Plan

If you have a plan in place for you and your pets, you will likely encounter less difficulty, stress and worry when you need to make a decision during an emergency. If local officials ask you to evacuate, that means your pet should evacuate too. If you leave your pets behind, they may end up lost, injured or worse.

Things to include in your plan:

- Have an evacuation plan for your pet. Many public shelters and hotels do not allow pets inside. Know a safe place where you can take your pets.
- Develop a buddy system. Plan with neighbors, friends or relatives to make sure that someone is available to care for or evacuate your pets.
- Have your pet microchipped. Make sure to keep your address and phone number up-to-date and include contact information.

Build a kit for your pet

Just as you do with your family's emergency supply kit, think first about the basics for survival, such as food and water.

- Food. Keep several days' supply of food in an airtight, waterproof container.
- Water. Store a water bowl and several days' supply of water.
- Medicine. Keep an extra supply of the medicine your pet takes on a regular basis in a waterproof container.
- First aid kit. Talk to your veterinarian about what is most appropriate for your pet's emergency medical needs.
- Collar with ID tag and a harness or leash. Include a backup leash, collar and ID tag. Have copies of your pet's relevant documents in a waterproof container and available electronically.
- Traveling bag, crate or sturdy carrier, ideally one for each pet.
- Grooming items. Pet shampoo, conditioner and other items, in case your pet needs some cleaning up.
- Sanitation needs. Include pet litter and litter box (if appropriate), newspapers, paper towels, plastic trash bags and cleaner for pet's sanitation needs.
- A picture of you and your pet together. If you become separated from your pet during an emergency, a picture identifying your pet.
- Familiar items. Put favorite toys, treats or bedding in your kit. Familiar items can help reduce stress for your pet.

From Ready.gov, for more information visit www.ready.gov/pets.

FIRE SAFETY FOR KIDS

Preschool fire safety

It is important to have a plan when there are children in your home because they may need assistance escaping, especially during emergencies. Their ability to get out safely may depend on other occupants. Some children are naturally curious about fire, but there are simple steps you can take to protect yourself and those you love from fire and burns.

According to the U.S. Fire Administration, from 2019-2022, the relative risk of dying in a fire for children aged 14 and under was 50% lower than that of the general population — the lowest relative risk for this age group since the mid-1970s. However, in 2024, Washington State reported that four children under the age of 14 died in fires, with the youngest victim being age 5.

The Washington State Fire Marshal's Office offers the following fire safety messages for parents and caregivers to share with preschoolers:

- Firefighters are community helpers — They wear special clothing and equipment to stay safe from smoke and fire. Do not be afraid of firefighters, even though their equipment may look and sound scary.
- When you hear a smoke alarm, get outside and stay outside — A smoke alarm alerts you to a fire and makes a loud "beep, beep, beep" sound when there is smoke. Get outside immediately and wait until a grown-up says it is safe to return. Practice a fire drill with your family using the smoke alarm sound.
- Stay away from hot things — Do not touch matches, lighters, or other hot items, as they can be dangerous. If you see them, walk away and tell a grown-up.
- Never hide during a fire — Smoke alarms can be a loud and startling sound, but do not hide. Follow a trusted grown-up's instructions and evacuate the area. Hiding can prevent firefighters from being able to find you and remove you safely.

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This news release was provided by the Washington State Fire Marshal's Office.

Fire safety for kindergarteners

Children are at significant risk in fire situations. Fires and burns are one of the leading causes of death for children under the age of 15. Young children may not be capable of escaping a fire on their own and may not understand the dangers of exposure. Their ability to escape may be dependent on other occupants.

In 2024, Washington State had four children under the age of 10 die from fire. Preventing house fires is the key to keeping children safe.

Here are some tips on how to keep children safe from a fire:

- Designate two ways out of every room.
- Make sure that windows are functional.
- Demonstrate for your children how to check doors to see if they are hot, and if so, how to find another way out.
- If a smoke alarm sounds, teach children to get outside and stay outside until a grown-up says it is safe to go back inside.
- Stay away from hot things.
- Do not touch matches or lighters and have them tell a grown-up if any are found.
- Let them know that firefighters are helpers, and they wear special gear to help them stay safe from fire. Although their equipment can look and sound scary, firefighters are there to help.
- Practice escape plans at least twice a year with children as part of fire safety.

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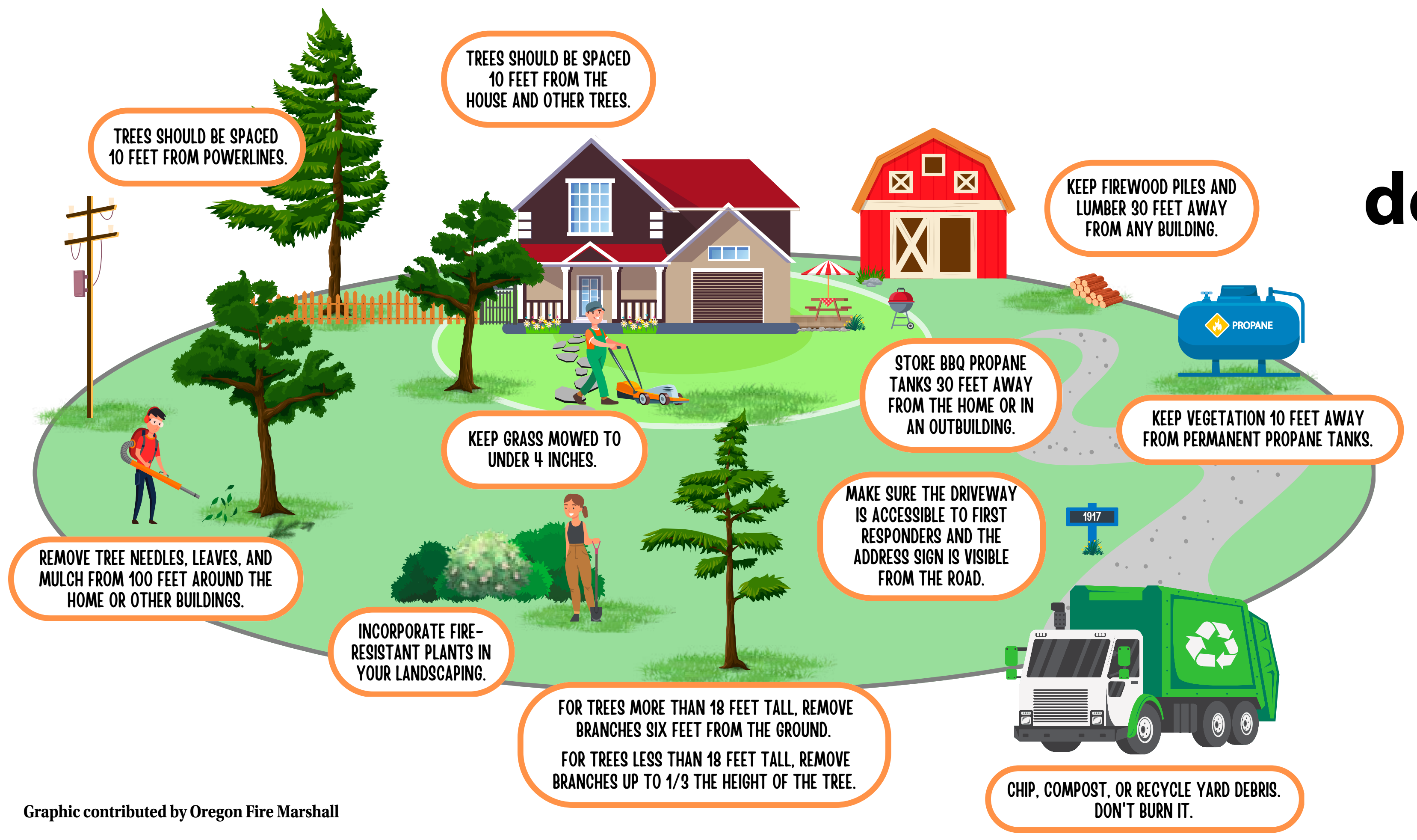
This news release was provided by the Washington State Fire Marshal's Office.



Graphic contributed by Oregon Fire Marshall

Create defensible space

Give your property an increased chance of surviving a wildfire.

Your home and defensible space

Fire requires three ingredients: fuel, heat and oxygen. Without any one of these elements, fire will not occur. While it is difficult to remove heat or oxygen to stop the progress of a wildfire, we can reduce the availability of fuel, either by replacing combustible materials with non-flammable ones or by reducing the amount of fuel available to burn. These steps can reduce your home's ignition potential and increase your home's likelihood of survival.

How do homes ignite?

Flying embers — on not the main fire front — ignite most homes that burn in wildfires. Embers can travel on high winds, far ahead of an advancing wildfire. Hood River County residents have seen how far embers can travel with enough wind — the Eagle Creek Fire jumped the Columbia River and started spot fires on the Washington side in 2017, crossing almost a mile of open river.

When embers land on or around your home and encounter combustible fuels in your gutters, on a patio chair or in pine litter around the base of your home, they can quickly ignite and spread. Embers can also enter your home through unscreened vents or other cracks and ignite your home from the inside.

The home ignition zone

The home ignition zone, or HIZ, is defined as the home and its immediate surroundings, out to a distance of 100 feet (or 200 feet on steeper slopes).

Studies by the U.S. Forest Service and the Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety (IBHS) have found that the condition of your HIZ is the primary factor determining whether your home will survive a wildfire. That's good news because it means that there are actions you can take to reduce your risk!

Where and how your home is constructed, including site location, design and building materials, influence whether your home will survive a wildfire. Additionally, the fuels near your home — including vegetation, like trees and shrubs and man-made fuels such as fences, decks and outbuildings — also affect ignitability.

The defensible space around your home includes three zones:
- Immediate zone: 0 to 5 feet from each structure
- Intermediate zone: 5 to 30 feet from each structure
- Extended zone: 30 to 100 feet from each structure (up to 200 feet on steep slopes)

Each zone has several checklist items to consider before fire season to help protect your home from wildfire. Following, we will offer suggestions for site considerations, home hardening and the three defensible space zones.

The big picture: Check your surroundings
- Locate and label water sources like hoses and sprinklers for potential use in fire response. Your fire department may be able to evaluate compatibility with their pumps and equipment.
- Minimize fuels, especially on your southern exposures and in the direction of prevailing winds, both of which cause vegetation to dry out more quickly.
- Consider focusing extra effort between your house and nearby structures such as a detached garage, shop, shed, or neighboring home. These structures are fuel that could ignite your home through ember cast or radiative heat.
- For emergency responders to find your home, street signs and address labels should be posted at each intersection leading to your home. Characters should be made of reflective, non combustible material and be at least 4 inches tall.
- Homes at the end of long driveways or dead-end roads should have pullouts for 2-way traffic and turnaround areas suitable for large fire equipment. Check with your fire department for specific requirements.
- Assess your topography and increase vegetation management if your house sits on a slope above dense vegetation, as fire spreads quickly going uphill.

Home Hardening: Reduce the chances that hot embers can enter your home
- Evaluate roofing materials and assembly. When replacing your roof, use a noncombustible material, such as composite or asphalt shingles, metal, slate, clay tile or concrete. Check annually to ensure shingles are in good condition: flat, with no missing shingles, tears, cracks or gaps.
- Install and maintain noncombustible roof gutters. Keep them free of litter and debris.
- Cover the underside of eaves with a soffit, box them in, or fill gaps with caulk. Open eaves can be exposed to embers and flames from below.
- Ensure all areas where the roof and siding meet are properly flashed.
- Consider fire-resistant sidings such as stucco, brick, steel or cement board. Seal any gaps in your siding to prevent ember intrusion.
- All attic, eave and foundation vents or crawl space openings should be covered with 1/8-inch or smaller wire mesh to keep embers from being blown inside. Consider closing vent shutters (but do not permanently cover vents).
- Ensure at least 6 vertical inches of non-combustible materials around the base of your home.

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This article was written by Kayla Bordelon, John Punches, Charles Young, Andrew Spaeth, Lauren Kraemer and Rachael Cleveland for OSU Extension.

Photo: Noah Noteboom

What is a prescribed burn?

Prescribed fires are a common tool used by land managers and conservation groups to reduce the amount of fuel available for wildfires, improve the health of older trees, support new and current wildlife habitats, and recycle soil nutrients back into the ground. Successful completion of a prescribed fire operation enhances public safety by providing wildland firefighters a safer landscape on which to fight a wildfire. It can also lessen the amount of smoke caused by wildfires due to the reduction of fuels.

A recent study completed by Washington Department of Natural Resources scientists found that forest health treatments that included prescribed fire in addition to mechanical thinning of tree stands were more likely to be effective when impacted by a wildfire.

The smoke impacts from prescribed fire are minimal and short-lived compared to those caused by wildfire. Burn crews carefully monitor conditions to limit the effects of smoke on nearby residents.

Smoke impacts may reduce visibility on roads adjacent to a prescribed burn.

Persons and businesses with increased sensitivity to smoke should be prepared to follow the same precautions they would for wildfire smoke. These include limiting physical activity outdoors, closing the fresh-air intake on air circulation systems, and creating a box fan filter.

For a video on making a box fan filter, visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=4qr1Aj-6Di7w.

Additional information is available on the Washington Department of Natural Resources website, www.dnr.wa.gov/Wildfires.

Outdoor recreationists and hunters are encouraged to check closure information frequently to ensure the areas they plan to visit are open. All burn areas will have signs posted in advance.

To learn more about prescribed burns, visit www.dnr.wa.gov/prescribedfire.

In Oregon, visit www.oregon.gov/odf/fire/pages/prescribed-fire.aspx.

Oregon grape is a safer alternative to landscaping plants and shrubs.

Avoid highly flammable plants within 30 feet of your home

Ornamental conifers such as Arborvitae and juniper contain volatile oils and waxes in their extremely flammable foliage and act as "green gasoline." They also tend to accumulate dead materials within the plant. Residents near orchards may use Arborvitae as a pesticide screen. Consider locating these flammable plants at least 30 feet from your home and other structures.

There are many landscaping alternatives to use near your home. Combinations of low-growing deciduous shrubs, herbaceous flowers and groundcover plants are far less likely to generate enough heat to ignite your home or surrounding vegetation. Portuguese laurel or Oregon grape may serve as alternatives for privacy screens.

For more information on what to plant, consult FireResistant Plants for Home Landscapes at beav.es/ce3 0.

Evacuation Checklist

15 Minutes to Pack:
Load with car facing out, and write names and emergency contact phone numbers on everyone 's forearm
-Critical Medical Items: Hearing aids, prescriptions, canes, oxygen, etc.
-Pets, leash, carriers
-Cash, wallet, purse
-Birth certificates, passport
-Keys: cars, house, shop, work, safety deposit box
-Phones, charger, power bank
-Laptop, computer, drives
-Flashlight, headlamps
-Coat, hat, leather shoes and gloves, N95 masks
-Home Insurance info
-Titles, deeds
-Kid's special comfort item
-Infant supplies

30 Minutes to Pack ADD:
Tell non-local emergency contact you are evacuating
-Valuable or family jewelry
-Photos including framed, Home Videos
-Address book/phone List
-First aid kit
-Clothing for 3-7 days
-Pillow, sleeping bag, blanket
-Battery radio
-Gas can
-Drinking water
-Irreplaceable heirlooms
-Cremains

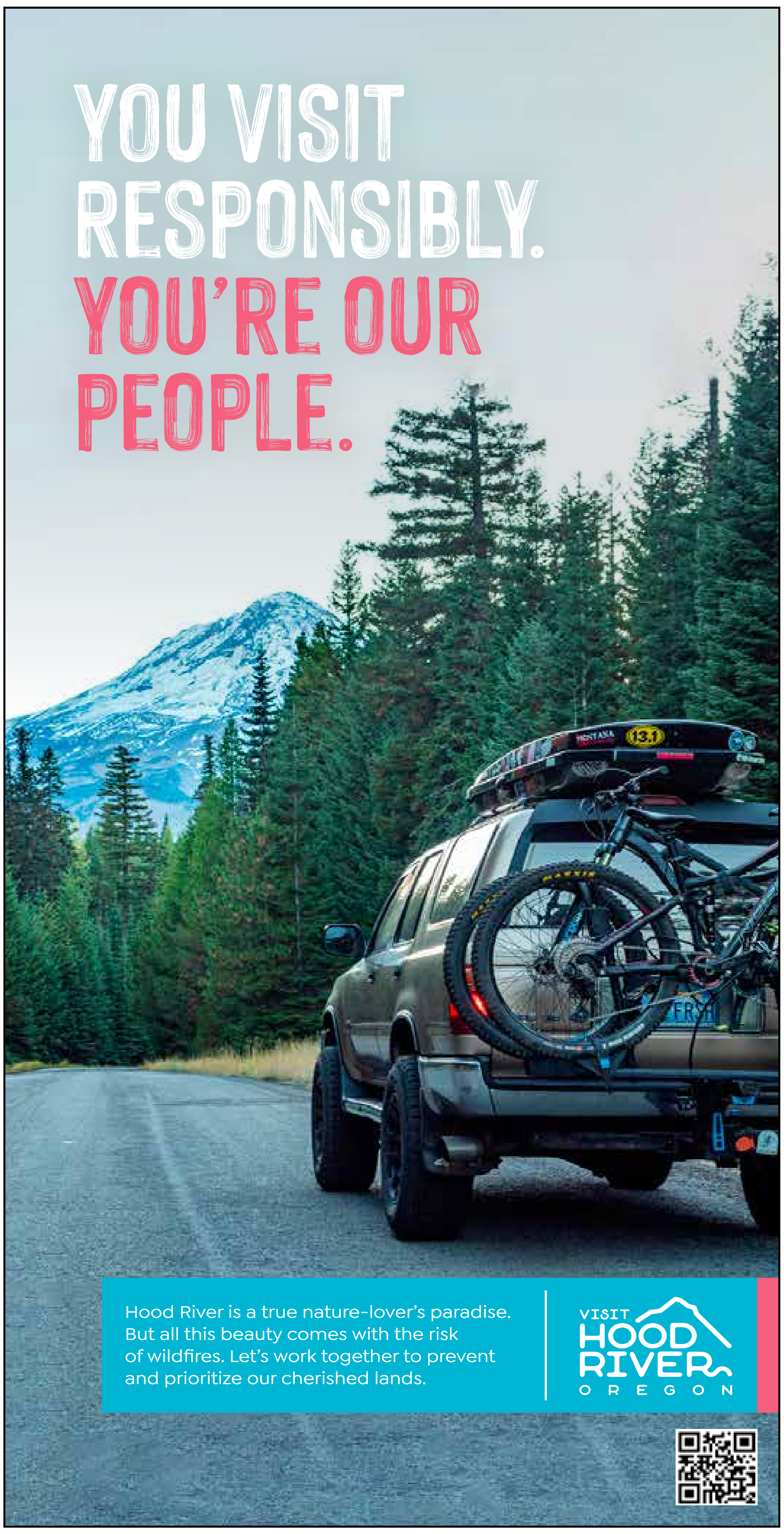
1 Hour to Pack ADD:
Take photos of contents of each room, and take or safeguard guns, ammo
-Special artwork
-Financial and medical files
-Wills, powers of attorney, legal documents
-Genealogy records
-Appraisals/receipts
-Fire extinguisher
-Chain saw (if rural)
-School items
-Military decorations awards and records
-Special diet items
-Extra eyeglasses
-Personal hygiene items
-Feminine sanitary items
-Kid activities
-Pet food, meds, license, litter, toys, crates

2 Hours to Pack ADD:
Relocate or pack secondary vehicles and move them to safe place; pack items in luggage
-Collectibles
-Journals, diaries, letters
-Valuable cameras, electronics, tools
-Camping equipment
-Awards
-Christmas ornaments
-Ice cooler with food, drink
-Non-perishable snacks
-Heirlooms/mementos
-Work files
-Sanitizing wipes

General Notes:
-Evacuate livestock and vulnerable family members at level 1 or 2.
-Constrain pets to be easily caught.
-Keep neighbors informed, check on vulnerable ones.
-Make sure you know which direction to drive.
-Do NOT assume you will have a chance to go back or that it's just a precaution.
-Imagine what you will need for a week staying on a cot in a school gym.
-Dress to protect yourself from fire and smoke.

Tips to prepare your home for firefighters as time allows:

-Turn on all lights.
-Turn off HVAC and gas, unplug appliances.
-Close all windows, interior and exterior doors.
-Open all gates.
-Place fire proof tarps over wood piles.
-Ladders in front yard.
-Hoses hooked up with squeeze nozzle sprayers.
-Move propane tanks, flammable or explosive items, outdoor furniture 30 feet away from the house.



Are you wildfire ready?

Knowing what to do before, during and after a wildfire can make a big difference in your safety. Taking simple steps to prepare today for fire or other emergencies with a step by step guide for you and your family. Be prepared for an emergency. For additional copies of this publication contact Gorge News at 541-386-1234 ext. 100 or email info@gorgenews.com.

According to federal data, only 48% of people have a plan if an emergency strikes.

But there are plenty of resources and step-by-step guides available to help you get started. A comprehensive guide can be found at www.ready.gov/plan.

"Your family may not be together if a disaster strikes, so it is important to know which types of disasters could affect your area," the website states. "Know how you'll contact one another and reconnect if separated. Establish a family meeting place that's familiar and easy to find."

Key steps are planning for emergencies and building an emergency kit.

Planning includes things like:

1. How will I receive emergency alerts and warnings?
2. What is my shelter plan?
3. What is my evacuation route?
4. What is my family/household communication plan?
5. Do I need to update my emergency preparedness kit?

While planning, keep in mind:

- Different ages of members within your household
- Responsibilities for assisting others
- Locations frequented
- Dietary needs
- Medical needs including prescriptions and equipment
- Disabilities or access and functional needs including devices and equipment
- Languages spoken
- Cultural and religious considerations
- Pets or service animals
- Households with school-aged children

The second step is creating an emergency kit. Basic supplies should include:

- Water (one gallon per person per day for several days, for drinking and sanitation)
- Food (at least a several-day supply of non-perishable food)
- Battery-powered or hand crank radio and a NOAA Weather Radio with tone alert
- Flashlight
- First aid kit
- Extra batteries
- Whistle (to signal for help)
- Dust mask (to help filter contaminated air)
- Plastic sheeting, scissors and duct tape (to shelter in place)
- Moist towelettes, garbage bags and plastic ties (for personal sanitation)
- Wrench or pliers (to turn off utilities)
- Manual can opener (for food)
- Local maps
- Cell phone with chargers and a backup battery

Additional considerations: Medications, hand sanitizer and cleaning wipes, baby or pet supplies, cash, important documents, extra clothes, sleeping bags.

Planning can seem overwhelming, so the "Do1Thing" nonprofit organization has dedicated itself to making emergency preparedness more doable. It breaks it down to taking one small, easy step per month toward improving your emergency preparedness.

For more information, visit www.do1thing.com.

Photo: unsplash