

# Fire Safety in the Pine Barrens

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## New Jersey 's Wildfire Problem

Land-use pressures, improved transportation, more leisure time, and an increased desire for a more rural lifestyle have resulted in a proliferation of residential subdivisions and developments in wild land areas that are subject to forest fire hazards. The majority of these developments have been planned and built without due consideration for forest fire protection.

The potential for wildfire disaster in New Jersey has been dramatically illustrated numerous times. Large conflagrations occurred several times from 1930 to 1992, and most recently in 1995. The most notable of the fires was on the weekend of April 20-21, 1963, when wildfires destroyed 183,000 acres of land, consumed 186 homes and 197 buildings, and were responsible for seven deaths. In 1995, one wildfire burned 19,225 acres in Ocean County, and during the summer drought of 1997, an 800-acre fire damaged 52 homes and threatened over 300 homes in Berkeley Township.

The "Wildland Urban Interface" is the term used to describe the placement of residential communities within forested areas. This trend is a problem not only in New Jersey, but national as well. Forest fires burning into developments have taken an increased toll on improved property. Several fires have reached disastrous proportions, destroying homes and taking lives.

Residents of wooded areas must take this threat seriously, and take precautions to prevent future disasters. The fire protection measures outlined in this brochure, as well as the use of prescribed burning to reduce hazardous accumulations of forest fuels, can provide an effective level of fire protection for homes in wild land urban interface.

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## DEFENSIBLE SPACE

The development of defensible space is vital to the survivability of a home when threatened by a wildfire. A minimum fuel break of not less than 30 feet should be established and maintained around all structures by the selective removal or thinning of trees, brush, ground cover and dead plant material. The amount of additional clearance and distance required to ensure adequate fire protection depends on the fuel hazard classification. The following guidelines should be used to make your home defensible for firefighters if it becomes threatened:

**MODERATE HAZARD:** Non-Pine Barrens, hardwood forest and northern hardwoods. Maintain a distance of 30 feet measured from the structure.

**HIGH HAZARD:** Pine Barrens forest including mature forms of pine oak and oak pine. Maintain a distance of 75 feet measured from the structure.

**EXTREME HAZARD:** Immature pine oak or oak pine less than 20 feet tall, pine scrub oak and all classes of pitch pine lowland. Maintain a distance of 100 feet measured from the structure.

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## Is Your Home Safe?

The following precautions are necessary to ensure a reasonable amount of protection for your rural or suburban forest home.

### **GENERAL CONSTRUCTION**

The roof and exterior of the structure should be constructed of fire resistant or treated material (asphalt, roofing, tile, slate, asbestos cement shingles, sheet iron, aluminum or brick). Wood siding, shakes, and all projections (balconies, decks, roofs, gables, etc.) should be built of materials treated with UL-approved fire retardant chemicals. Cedar shakes should be avoided.

### **PROTECT THE ROOF**

Clean gutters and roof surfaces of all accumulations of leaves and pine needles.

### **REMOVE DEAD LIMBS**

Remove dead limbs from any trees adjacent to, or overhanging, your house.

### **PREVENT CHIMNEY AND FLUE FIRES**

Inspect periodically and keep them free of soot. Have an approved spark arrester or heavy wire screen with openings of no more than 1/2 inch on your fireplace. Remove tree branches within 10 feet of chimney.

### **DEVELOP A WATER SUPPLY**

A garden hose outlet is needed on the exterior of the building. One hundred feet of hose should be racked and connected to the outlet to protect all sides of the house and roof.

### **PROTECT FROM FLAMMABLES**

Stack firewood 30 feet away from the house and other buildings. Keep flammables in safety cans. Screen openings in roof attics and floors to prevent accumulations of needles, leaves, or other debris.

### **LANDSCAPE PLANTINGS**

Landscape plantings should be non-resinous and well watered (no laurel, rhododendron or flammable evergreens). Remove leaf litter and dead plant debris promptly.

### **GREEN LAWNS**

A green lawn that is well watered and mowed is also a good fuel break. However, grass should not be allowed to grow tall or dry out because in that condition it is one of the fastest burning fuels.

### **FIRE PERMITS**

All campfires in forested areas require a permit from the Forest Fire Service. Contact your local forest fire warden or fire official.

### **HOME IDENTIFICATION**

House numbers should be visible from the roadway. If your home is not visible from the road, ensure that the driveway is clearly labeled with a sign showing the occupant's name and house number.

### **ACCESS ROAD AND ESCAPE ROUTE**

Access roads to your property should be at least 16 feet wide to allow easy entrance for fire trucks and passage of vehicles evacuating the area. The name of the road should be posted at intersections and the name of the occupants at the driveway entrance. Dead-end roads should terminate in a cul-de-sac with a minimum turnaround radius of 45 feet. Plan a safe escape route for you and your family before you are confronted with a wildfire!

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### **ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS**

1. Areas around barbeques should be cleared to mineral soil for a radius of 10 feet in all directions.
2. Have firefighting equipment on hand (100 feet of garden hose with nozzle, shovel, rake, bucket, and extension ladder).
3. Children should be trained in how to report a forest fire or any other emergency, and what they should do in an emergency situation.
4. Post phone numbers for local police, fire company, and fire warden in a conspicuous place.

To report a wildfire, call 911 or contact your local Forest Fire warden.

#### **DON'T**

- \* Allow leaves and twigs to accumulate on roof.
- \* Store flammable materials near the house foundation.
- \* Allow branches of nearby trees to overhang the house.
- \* Let trees and shrubbery crowd-in on the house.
- \* Operate a woodstove or fireplace with an unsafe chimney.

#### **DO**

- \* Clean roof surfaces. Remove leaf and needle accumulations.
- \* Stack firewood well clear of the house.
- \* Prune lower branches of overhanging limbs on nearby trees.
- \* Establish and maintain a minimum fire break of not less than 30 feet around all structures by the selective removal and thinning of trees, brush and ground cover.
- \* Install a spark arrester on the fireplace chimney.

For More Information about Protecting your Home from Wildfire, or Forest Fire Management in New Jersey , Contact One of the Following Offices:

Division C Headquarters  
Southern NJ  
5555 Atlantic Ave. ,  
Mays Landing , NJ 08330  
609-625-1121

Forest Fire Service Headquarters  
Trenton Office  
501 E. State Street , 4th Floor,  
P.O. Box 404 ,  
Trenton , NJ 08625  
609-292-2977

\* Information from New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Forest Fire Service