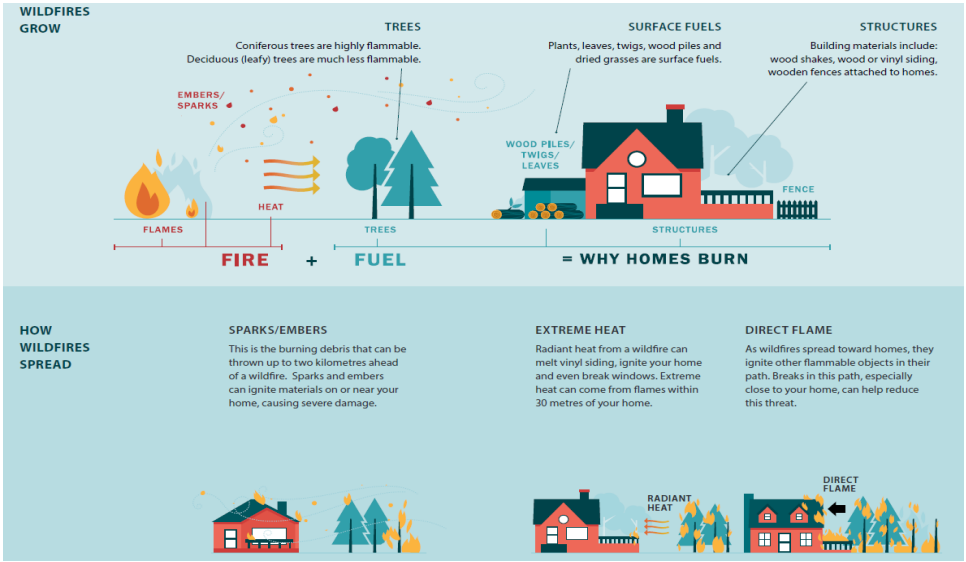
2019.07.31

Wildfire Newsletter

Feels like home: keeping communities FireSmart

Humans have left a lasting imprint on B.C.'s landscape. This is especially prevalent in areas where properties border on wildlands (such as forests or grasslands), which are known as wildland urban interface (WUI) areas. An increasing number of homes are being built in or on the boundary of these WUI areas, which means there is a shared responsibility to care for these areas between communities and forests. With communities continuing to grow, WUI areas will only get larger. This will create a greater need for community wildfire preparedness in both urban and outlying areas.

Preventing and preparing for future fire seasons can start right at home. Wildfires can spread faster on private land when: coniferous trees and plants are not pruned and thinned; twigs and leaves are allowed to accumulate, and woodpiles are unmaintained. Although deciduous trees (leafy trees) are much less flammable than coniferous trees, they still present a wildfire risk when nearby fires (such as campfires) release airborne embers or sparks. Fires can move extremely fast, especially when spreading uphill, with sparks and embers capable of being carried by the wind up to two kilometres before burning out. Wooden building materials, wood roofs and vinyl siding can fuel a structural fire. Once fire spreads within the walls of a building, all flammable objects within it can become kindling. Fifty percent of structure fires are caused by airborne embers and sparks, so establishing a 10-metre buffer zone around your home where there are no flammable materials will limit the chance of wildfire damage to your home. Taking note of potential fire hazards on your property and in your neighbourhood is the first preventative measure you can take to help keep your home safe.

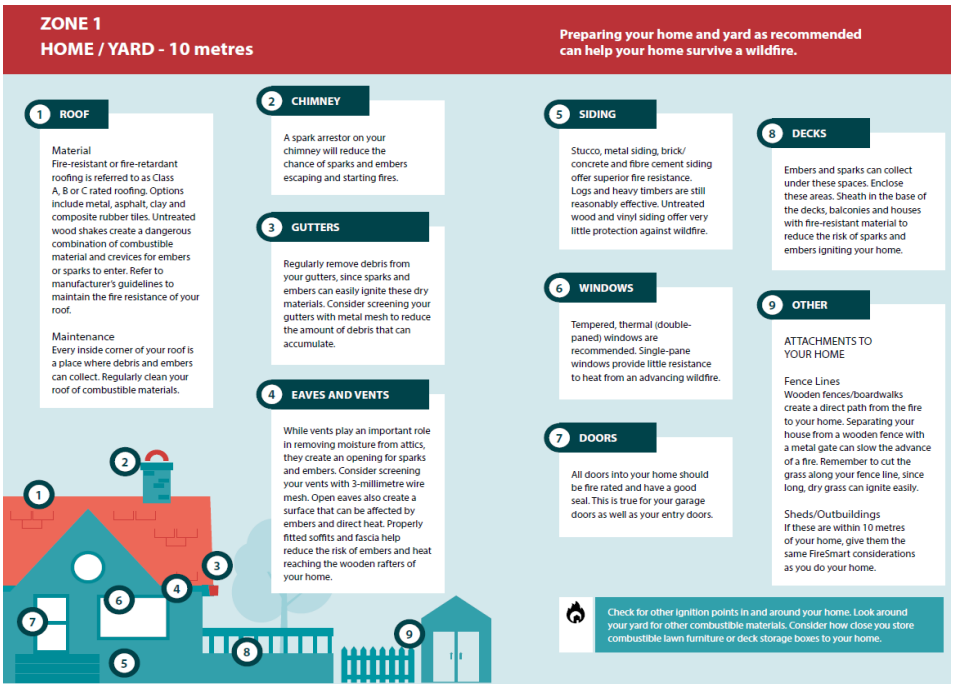


For information about how wildfires grow and spread, see the FireSmart Homeowner's Manual online at: http://ow.ly/nV6Y30pgdWe

Follow us on Twitter: @BCGovFireInfo and Facebook: @BCForestFireInfo

Feels like home: keeping communities FireSmart (continued)

Prepare and protect your yard and home by keeping both free of flammable debris and as fire-resistant as possible. Check for potential ignition points in and around your home, such as accumulations of leaves in gutters, and include other types of combustible materials in your search. By maintaing and tidying up your property regularly, it doesn't become a massive chore. Outdoor spaces can be easily modified and tidied up to significantly reduce wildfire risk. A FireSmart "clean up" task can be as simple as pruning trees and removing branches near the ground, which can stop surface fires from moving into treetops. If you have dry leaves, twigs and branches within your yard or gutters, take the initiative and remove these potential hazards.



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There are many beautiful trees, shrubs and flowers with low water needs that are naturally fire-resistant. FireSmart trees include poplar, birch, aspen, cottonwood, maple, alder, ash and cherry. "Xeriscaping" is a method of gardening that reduces or eliminates the need for irrigation or regular watering. It doesn't sacrifice beauty, conserves water and reduces fire hazards. Xeriscaped gardens require less weeding, fertilization, pruning, mowing and pesticide use, which makes yards easier to manage.

For more information about FireSmart and BC Wildfire, please visit:

www.firesmartbc.ca or www.firesmartcanada.ca and www.bcwildfire.ca

Structural Protection Units: What you need to know

Types of Structural Protection Units

Type 1 Unit: helps protect 100-150 structures

Type 2 Unit: helps protect 20-25 structures

Type 3 Unit: helps protect 8-10 structures

Urban Structure Protection Unit: helps protect around 300 structures, but it needs a large and very clean water supply to be effective

Structural Protection Units (SPUs) can be used if a wildfire presents an imminent threat to structures such as homes. There are four different types of SPUs. They can all be transported in trailers and consist of sprinkler systems specifically designed to defend structures. Essentially, these sprinklers create a bubble of mist over the structure, which dramatically drops the temperature and increases the relative humidity within the bubble. These sprinkler systems are extremely effective. A wildfire can leave such a protected structure relatively unharmed, while everything around it may burn.

The Structural Protection Program has been around since 2003, but was recently incorporated into the BC Wildfire Service (BCWS) in the winter of 2017. BCWS currently owns six Type 1 trailers and one Type 2 trailer, and maintains numerous contracts with local fire departments and municipalities that also own this type of equipment. In total, BCWS has access to 46 Structural Protection Units, some of which are dispersed throughout the summer to different areas of the province, depending on anticipated wildfire activity.

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When a certain area is in-need of structural protection units due to a wildfire approaching, the BC Wildfire Service's Structure Protection Specialists will assess threatened structures to determine if they are "defendable" or not. It's more likely for an SPU to be deployed on a property threatened by a wildfire if that property has been "FireSmarted" than if it has not. If a structure and the surrounding property looks FireSmart, it will take less time to set up the necessary sprinklers needed to cover the structure. With less time needed to deploy structural protection units on such properties, more homes can be protected in the limited time available. A major reason why a particular structure may not receive sprinkler protection is because FireSmart principles have not been used on the property, which increases the time to set up enough sprinklers to sufficiently protect it.

For example, if sprinklers can be set up to protect three FireSmart properties in the same amount of time it would take to set up sprinklers around a structure that is not FireSmart the three FireSmart structures will likely receive protection first, while a non-FireSmart house may not receive any protection from an SPU. These types of decisions are difficult to make and often must be made quickly when a wildfire is approaching. If homeowners have prepared their property by using FireSmart principles, they have a much higher chance of receiving structural protection than a property that isn't FireSmart.

Some examples of what a Structure Protection Specialist will look for while doing an assessment and deciding whether a structure is defendable or not are:

- a metal roof versus a cedar shingle roof
- general cleanliness of the property
- combustibles on a deck
- vegetation type and its proximity to the structure
- location of any woodpile in relation to the house (not right next to the structure or under a deck)

More information about FireSmart is available at FireSmartBC.ca or FireSmartCanada.ca

Photo courtesy of Ron French, BC Wildfire Service.

To prepare yourself for a wildfire in British Columbia, visit:
http://ow.ly/7BR830pdPNk

FACES FROM THE FIRELINE

Jessa Barber

How long have you been a BC Wildfire Service (BCWS) firefighter?
This is my first season as a crew leader, and fifth season with Penticton Initial Attack.

Why did you decide to become a crew leader with BCWS?
The people I work with mean the world to me, and I hope to be a role model and a driver of positive growth at our base. A crew leader position means I can have a say in how we operate and I can be involved in making this an awesome place to work. I was nervous to step into a new role because of how comfortable I was as a crew member, and for fear of making mistakes as a crew leader. What outweighed this worry was an excitement to learn, challenge myself, and solve the puzzles posed by every new fire. The crew leaders I've worked with in previous years have helped me understand that some mistakes are inevitable and success comes when you learn from them.

What has been the most rewarding aspect of your career with BCWS?
There are a few outstanding aspects of this job that make me want to return every year. The first is the confidence I have gained by pushing myself out of my comfort zone (within reason). The second is working incredibly hard to complete something that proves to be a challenge. This can be anything from digging kilometers of fire guard to organizing a training exercise or working multiple fires in one day. The third aspect of this job that makes it so enjoyable is seeing and feeling the support for team members both on the crew and elsewhere in the organization. When a crew member shares the workload with someone who is struggling, I see how it lifts up the entire crew. This support has only grown stronger in my time with BCWS, and the focus on putting people first is something that makes me proud to work here.

With your five seasons of experience in initial attack, what is one piece of advice you would pass on to anyone starting out in that role?
If I could give one piece of advice to anyone new to initial attack, it would be to get to know the strengths of others on your team rather than trying to do everything yourself. When I first started on a crew, I often tried to prove myself by saying yes to everything and spreading myself thin. BCWS attracts an amazing diversity of people, and when you step back to let everyone shine doing what they do best, it greatly increases the team's capacity.

Do you have any hobbies?
My passion outside of work is rock climbing and I try to get out to Skaha Bluffs whenever I can. I spend the winters on Vancouver Island studying geography at the University of Victoria, and most recently lived in Tofino for a field study program focusing on the health of coastal communities. I am also a budding breadmaker and currently learning to play guitar.

Do you have a fun fact about yourself that you would like everyone to know?
An interesting fact about me is that I start my day with 10-20 minutes of meditation, no matter what.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Report a wildfire	*5555 on a cell or 1 800 663-5555
Wildfire information line	1 888 3FOREST
Burn registration line	1 888 797-1717
Kamloops Fire Centre information line	250 554-5965