

## FireSmart—Is Your Home at Risk?

By Ellen Pelto—Office of the Fire Commissioner

If you live near a forested region, sooner or later you will have to contend with the spread of a wildfire. The best protection against loss, damage or injury due to wildfire is prevention. Some of these preventative measures cost very little and reduce fire dangers a great deal;

### Did you know that...

- ◆ Crowning forest fires often spread up to 5.5 km/hr, with spotting as far as 2 km ahead?
- ◆ Wind blown grass fires can spread up to 8.5 km/hr?
- ◆ This creates extreme dangers to anyone living in a forested area?

others require planning and a long-term commitment to change. There are three areas where you should apply FireSmart standards to make your property safer.

Your first priority is to clear the zone within 10 metres of your home and building. This can be done by removing shrubs, trees, deadfall or woodpiles and keeping grass mowed and wa-

tered. A good fuel-free space gives firefighters a chance to save your home from an advancing fire.

Your next priority is to reduce fuels by thinning and pruning from 10 - 30 metres out from your home by removing trees and debris that can spread fire upward.

Finally, thin or reduce shrubs and trees 30 metres from any structure so fires will be of low intensity and more easily extinguished. While this is a longer term commitment, it will help to reduce the hazards of wildfire for you and your neighbours.

For more information on how to FireSmart your property, contact your local fire department for **The Home Owners Fire Smart Manual: Protect your home from wildfire**, or view the brochure on the Office of the Fire Commissioner website at [www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/](http://www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/)

### Construction

- ◆ The roof is the most important part of the structure in determining whether or not an interface fire will consume the building. Use metal, asphalt, ULC-rated treated shakes or non-combustible material and keep it clear of debris. Do not use unrated wood shakes.
- ◆ With the exception of the roof, the siding is the most vulnerable structural component of a building in a wildfire situation. Use non-combustible siding such as stucco, metal siding, brick, cement shingles, concrete block, poured concrete, and rock. Untreated wooden shake or shingle siding provides no protection and vinyl siding could melt, leaving exposed wood.
- ◆ Eaves should be closed and vents screened with corrosion resistant 3 millimetre mesh and be accessible. Soffit vents should be located away from the exterior wall.
- ◆ Close in bottom of balconies and decks with non-combustible material. Needles, twigs and litter may accumulate below a deck, increasing the fire danger.
- ◆ Large windows are more vulnerable to fracture and collapse than smaller windows. Double and triple pane windows are less likely to fracture than single pane, and tempered glass provides more safety than plate glass.

### Landscape

- ◆ Firewood, building material (and other combustible debris piles), neighbouring buildings and wooden storage sheds are all serious fire dangers. Relocate such accumulations of fuel as far as possible from the main structure (10 metres is ideal).
- ◆ Fire will burn more quickly uphill. One-storey structures should be set back a minimum of 10 metres from the slope. Two-storey buildings need to be set back proportionally further.
- ◆ Remove any shrubs, trees or deadfall from the area adjacent to the main structure (10 metres). Keep the grass mown and watered in this area.
- ◆ Remove or reduce the number of evergreen trees that are within close proximity to the main structure. Consider thinning, pruning or removing any large stands of trees in the areas around the main structure.
- ◆ Replace evergreens such as pine or spruce with aspen, poplar or birch which have low flammability rates.
- ◆ Space trees 3—6 metres between crowns.
- ◆ Remove mature trees that might provide the opportunity for a ground fire to climb up into the forest canopy. Once a fire crowns, it is almost impossible to stop. Remove branches up to 2 metres from the bottom of the tree to prevent laddering.



## To Date in Coastal

### Fires to Date

Person Caused **195**

Lightning Caused **329**

Total Number of Fires Actioned **524**

Hectares burnt **7,132**

Number of Incidents Responded To this year **1829**

### Fire Danger Rating



**Low**

**Be Safe!**

## Wildfires and Families

Fire behaviour, forest fuel management and other aspects of fire fighting are considered extremely rational and analytical activities, but when families are forced from their homes, the job becomes extremely emotional. People who are fire-affected are not concerned with the science of fire but how the fire affects their lives.

Even when a family is not evacuated but is living adjacent to an area affected by wildfire, they must deal with the anxiety of not knowing whether the fire will disrupt their lives. Uncertainty is one of the most difficult things to deal with in a wildfire situation.

First reactions are generally fear: where will I go, what will I do, will I be safe? This is often followed by anger—at officials for not being there sooner or not doing enough, or simply anger at the situation itself. During the event, up-to-date fire information seems to be one way in which people can gain some semblance of control and helps in easing anxiety. Poor communication with those affected, however, can quickly change to anger and disillusionment as people seek more concrete

answers and expect a detailed and satisfactory response. Real answers that are jargon-free, given in a timely and consistent fashion, help to alleviate stress and this is the goal of the Fire Information team at the Coastal Fire Centre.

Another way in which to avoid many of these misunderstandings is to educate those living in wildland/urban interfaces. By giving some of the power and responsibility back to homeowners, residents will have a better understanding of wildfire behavior and how to mitigate the wildfire's damage with FireSmart practices. Most important, it will allow people to see fire officials in a proactive role that supports and prepares people for a fire incident.

If the community is aware of the high risk areas in their community, have FireSmarted their land and their communities, and have at least had discussions on wildfire preparedness, they become partners in the process rather than victims of a potential wildfire.

For more information on FireSmart go to: [bcwildfire.ca/Prevention/Property/firesmart.htm](http://bcwildfire.ca/Prevention/Property/firesmart.htm).

## Category 1 & 2 Open Fire lift

Due to recent precipitation, the Coastal Fire Centre has lifted the restriction on Category 1 & 2 open fires in any area within its jurisdiction as of noon on Oct 2, 2009. Campfire and Category 3 (industrial) open burning restrictions have been previously lifted.

People planning to do yard clean up and burning should first check with their local fire department, municipality, or regional district to find out if there are bylaws in effect pertaining to open burning.

If open burning is allowed in the area, and the person is planning to burn a pile larger than a typical backyard burn pile (2 meters high by 3 meters wide) they must obtain a burn registration number first. To obtain a burn registration number within the Coastal Fire Centre, call 250.951.4222.

The Coastal Fire Centre area has experienced

precipitation, and fire danger ratings have reduced to Low in most areas. Temperatures are expected to range in the mid teens to low 20s during the day. No additional rain is in the forecast for the next week, and nights are forecasted to be cool, with high relative humidities.

People who undertake burning should be aware that fuels may dry quickly on sunny, south facing slopes in the afternoon. The Coastal Fire Centre cautions people to be aware of windy conditions that could spread sparks, and to make sure there are enough people, water and hand tools on site and be ready to prevent their fires from escaping. The fire should never be left unattended, and the fire should be completely out before leaving the area.

People who light the fire should be aware that, if the fire escapes, they may be liable for fire suppression costs and damages.