



National Firewise Communities Program: A Resource for State and Local Agencies

NWCG Wildland/Urban Interface Working Team

USDA Forest Service

*U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Indian Affairs
Bureau of Land Management
US Fish & Wildlife Service
National Park Service*

*Federal Emergency Management
Agency*

*International Association of Fire
Chiefs*

*National Association of State Fire
Marshals*

*National Association of State
Foresters*

*National Emergency Management
Association*

*National Fire Protection
Association*

US Fire Administration

The national Firewise Communities program is a multi-agency effort designed to reach beyond the fire service by involving homeowners, community leaders, planners, developers, and others in the effort to protect people, property, and natural resources from the risk of wildland fire – *before a fire starts*. The Firewise Communities approach emphasizes community responsibility for the design and maintenance of a safe community, including sound land use planning, creative mitigation measures, supportive infrastructure, collaborative decision making, and effective emergency response.

The national Firewise Communities program serves as a resource for agencies, tribes, organizations, fire departments, and communities across the U.S. who are working toward a common goal: reduce loss of lives, property, and resources to wildland fire by building and maintaining communities in a way that is compatible with our natural surroundings.

Firewise Defined

Originally coined in 1992 by a botanist working with the National Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Program, the term “firewise” describes the state of being knowledgeable and prepared for wildfire in residential or urban settings. While the national program carries the title “Firewise Communities,” there are thousands of local and regional efforts that are committed to this concept – such as Fire Safe Councils. The national Firewise Communities program is designed to support and complement these efforts – it does not conflict or compete with them.

National Firewise Communities Program Structure

The fire season of 1985 motivated wildfire agencies and organizations to focus on local solutions to wildfire risks in populated areas by forming what is now the National Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Program, directed by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group’s Wildland/Urban Interface Working Team (WUIWT), a consortium of representatives from federal and state wildland fire agencies and organizations. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) handles daily management of Firewise Communities with guidance from the WUIWT.

Resources for State Forestry Agencies

The national Firewise Communities program offers a number of resources to state forestry agencies, including support for local workshops, an interactive website (www.firewise.org), educational tools, and support for fire organizations and community groups. A summary of resources is included on the following page.

Of particular interest to states is the Firewise Communities/USA program, which recognizes residential developments that take action to mitigate their wildfire risk. Communities that meet the program’s criteria are encouraged to apply for national recognition through their state forestry agency. Large organized efforts, such as county-wide Fire Safe Councils, can help foster the creation of Firewise Communities/USA sites within their neighborhoods, subdivisions, and other residential developments.

In addition to member agencies and organizations, the National WUI Fire Program functions in cooperation with other NWCG Working Teams, the National Fire Plan and related programs.



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Program Resources

The national Firewise Communities program provides wildland/urban interface resources for firefighter safety, community planning, landscaping, construction, and maintenance.

- ***Firewise Web Site:*** www.firewise.org
The Firewise Web site provides educational information about wildland/urban interface fire to homeowners and agency fire staff. The interactive site features a wealth of information on how to mitigate wildfire risks at the homeowner and community levels. Web site visitors can view streaming video; download documents; browse an extensive list of helpful links; and use a searchable library of national, state, and local documents on a wide range of wildfire safety issues.
- ***Firewise Communities/USA Recognition Program***
To facilitate local solutions to wildfire preparedness goals, the Firewise Communities/USA program recognizes communities for working together to protect residents and property from fire in the wildland/urban interface. To be recognized as a Firewise Communities/USA site, communities must create and implement a plan with cooperative assistance from state forestry agencies and local fire staff. In addition, communities are required to continue regular maintenance and education to retain recognition status.
- ***Firewise Information Resources***
The national Firewise Communities program is continuously developing informational materials to help community organizations understand and address wildland/urban interface issues. The Web-based Firewise Communities materials catalog provides more than 30 audiovisual and print materials for agencies, firefighters and homeowners, such as instructional videos, home construction checklists, mini-documentaries, CD-ROMs, school education projects, and more. *All materials are free. Shipping charges apply.*
- ***Firewise Communities Workshops***
The national Firewise Communities programs supports regional and local organizations interested in hosting Firewise workshops using materials supplied by the national program. Firewise Communities workshops prepare community leaders and fire service professionals to recognize wildland/urban interface fire hazards, make homes and landscapes Firewise, deliver fire education to residents, and incorporate Firewise planning into existing and developing areas of communities. These dynamic workshops can feature interactive discussions, mapping, and wildfire simulations. Firewise workshops are most successful when they are attended by a variety of community representatives, such as planners, business leaders, homeowner association members and emergency service professionals.
- ***Firewise Community Support Resources***
The national Firewise Communities program staff provides assistance and advice to communities engaged in planning and mitigation of wildland/urban interface fire hazards. In cooperation with state and federal partners, staff provides support to communities and their advocates by helping to identify local needs and integrate Firewise concepts into comprehensive plans and multi-hazard mitigation plans; helping to connect communities with appropriate tools, techniques and technologies to further their Firewise activities.