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Wildfire

SURVIVAL GUIDE

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- Firewise your property
- Apply for grants
- Assess your risk
- Pack to flee
- Get out safely



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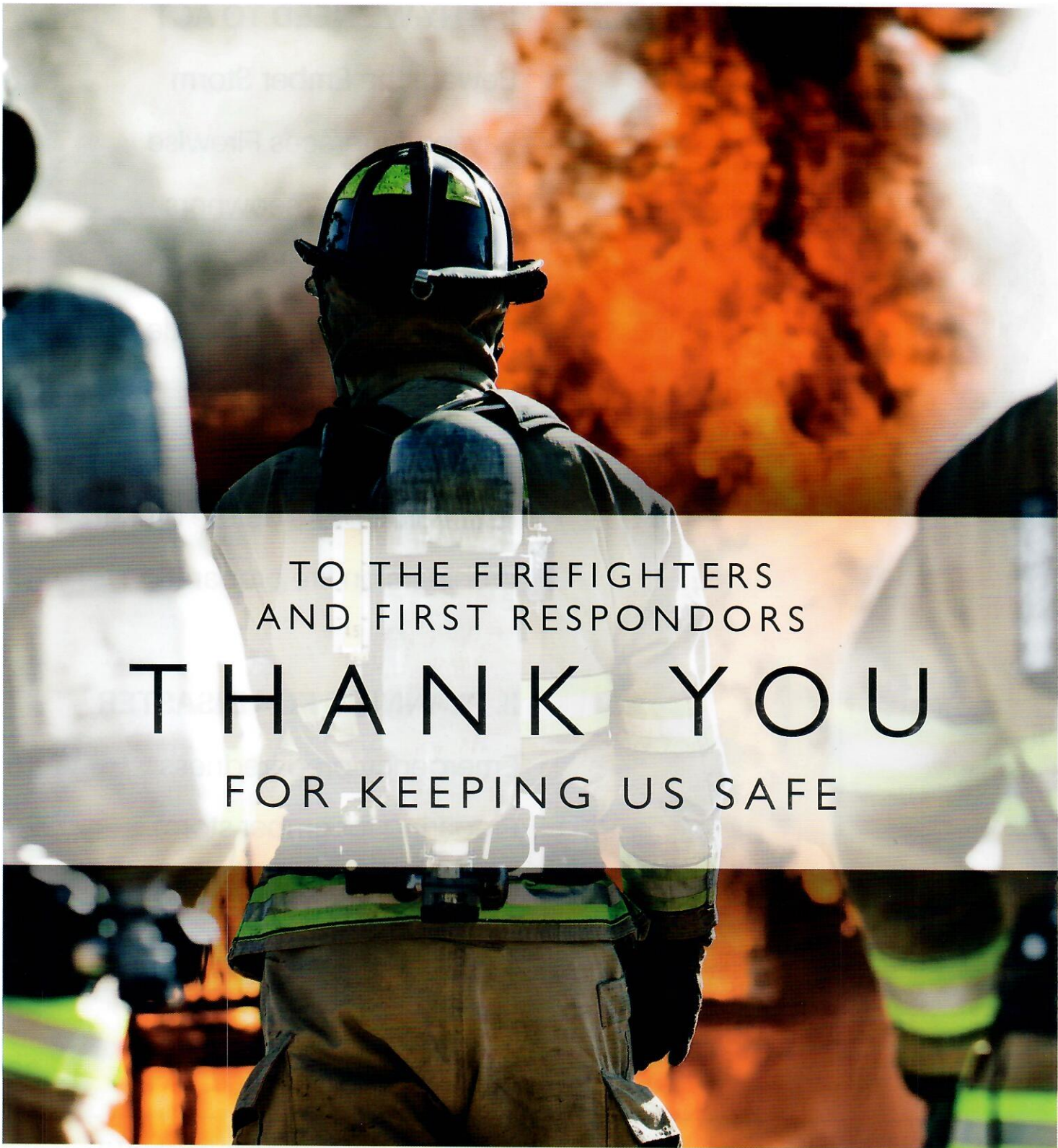


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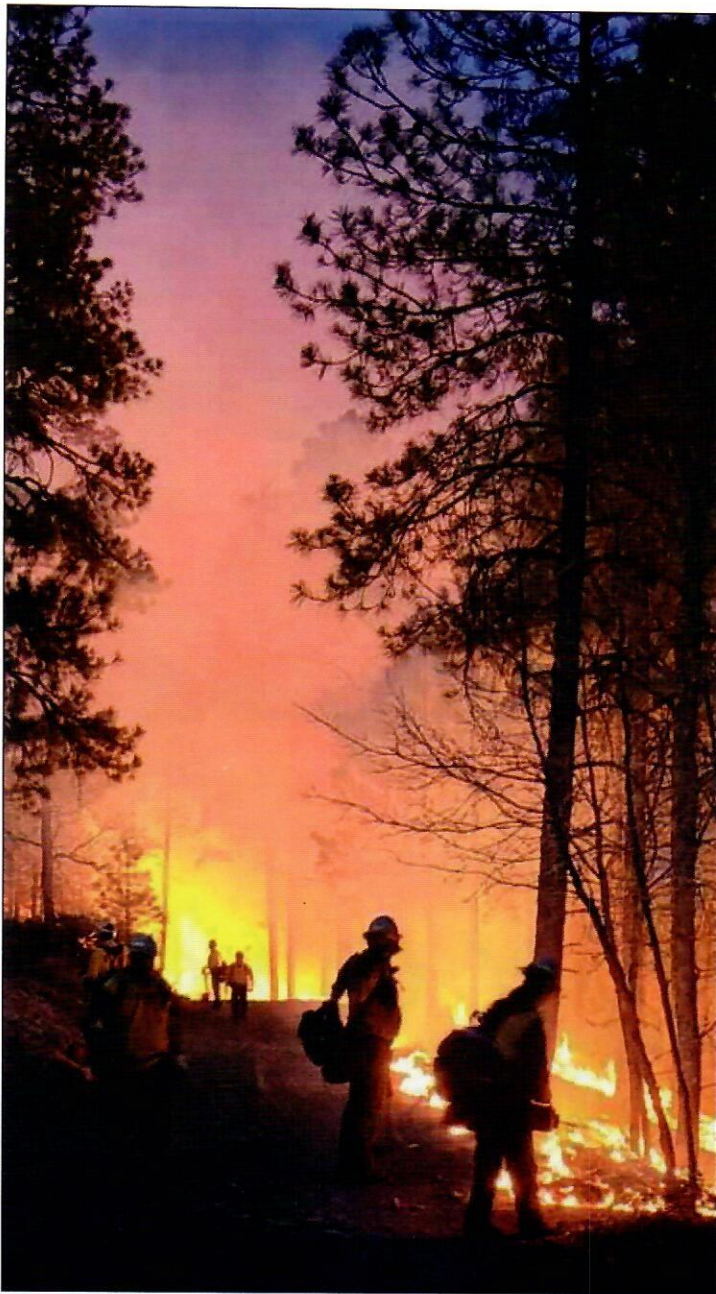


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The 41,000-acre Backbone Fire this year forced the evacuation of Pine and Strawberry. A shift in the weather enabled firefighters to establish fire lines to protect the communities and did not generate the kind of ember storm that destroyed Paradise, Calif. Volunteers in Pine have worked hard to encourage homeowners to Firewise the community, but Pine, Strawberry, Payson and other Rim Country communities remain unprepared for a megafire. This publication explores what you can do to protect your home and family.

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Can Payson avoid Yarnell's fate?

By Michele Nelson

The town of Yarnell, scene of the 2013 Yarnell Hill Fire, did not prepare for the inferno that swept in out of the overgrown forest and chaparral.

As a result, 19 firefighters lost their lives.

127 people lost their homes.

Studies show that if Yarnell residents had cleared brush from abutting structures, cleaned up ladder fuel, removed duff from roofs, and thinned buffer zones around the community, the fire would have done much less damage.

And those 19 Granite Mountain Hotshot firefighters might not have died in thick brush close to the sanctuary of a Firewised ranch, as they attempted to save Yarnell from itself.

Payson has finally started to learn from that tragic lesson by adopting a Firewise brush clearing code while considering a wildland-urban interface (WUI) building code — but is it in time?

The Yarnell Hill Fire study from the Pacific Biodiversity Institute found 63 homes survived the Yarnell Hill Fire simply because the owners Firewised their property. The rest of the community fell to the flames, as the fire spread through the overgrown brush and trees from house to house.

If property owners Firewise their property, and harden their structures with fire-resistant materials, they become partners with firefighters, not a liability.

Payson's Fuel Mitigation Officer Kevin McCully suggests homeowners tackle Firewise bit by bit.

"I tell them to start by cleaning up everything next to their home," he said.

Remove mulch, wood chips, needles or weeds and grass that nestle at the base of a wall, they serve as kindling to ignite the siding and eaves.

The taller the weeds and brush, the higher the flames and greater the radiant heat.

Corners offer a particular problem because they cut the wind, which causes more direct contact with flames.

Instead of using mulch to fill areas, consider rock and concrete walkways.

Keep any lawn or low-growing non-woody plants — if any — out of the five-foot zone next to a house.

Remove debris from rain gutters.

Trim tree branches six feet from the ground. Trim branches away from roofs.

If the home has any decks, make sure to protect five feet out from the edge of the deck as well.

Ultimately, remove fuels beneath all the trees, knock back grass and weeds and space bushes far enough apart so they do not start the house on fire.

That's exactly what the residents of Yarnell failed to do.

They didn't have a Firewise ordinance.

They didn't have WUI building standards, requiring fire-resistant roofs, decks and building materials.

They didn't insist the state thin the overgrown chaparral on the state lands surrounding the community, which hadn't burned in decades.

They didn't clear the brush and trees from around their homes.

They didn't develop a clear, practiced evacuation plan.

So when the fire blew up, they had no plan — and no safe space where firefighters could make a stand against wind-driven, 100-foot-long flames that raced through the tinder-dry forest faster than a man could run.

The Hotshot fire crew saw the danger to the community, which the residents had ignored for so long. They tried to make it down off the burned hilltop on which they stood in time to defend the community.

But they didn't make it.

That brave, mistaken, tragic decision to try to save the town, cost them their lives.



This picture of the Yarnell Hill Fire advancing on homes through thick brush illustrates the need to clear defensible spaces around homes. The fire killed 19 firefighters trying to defend the town, which had no Firewise ordinance and no WUI building code.



Paradise lost: Beware the ember storm

By Peter Aleshire

They carefully planned their evacuation routes.
They nagged people to clear the brush from around homes.
They worried about the drought and nearby fires.
But in the end, they didn't do enough.

They fatally underestimated the beast – in a terrifying new age of megafires. So when the Camp Fire cast glowing embers five or seven miles ahead of the flaming front, Paradise, California wasn't ready. As a result, the town burned to the ground – and the flames killed 85 people as they fled or tried to ride out the fire in poorly prepared homes. The Camp Fire ultimately consumed 18,000 structures and 150,000 acres of drought-dried forest and became the most deadly and expensive fire in California history. The fire inflicted \$17 billion in losses – including \$3 billion just to clean up the toxic debris of the smoldering communities.

But national studies show that Payson, Pine, Show Low, Pinetop and other Arizona communities face a greater fire danger – and are less prepared – than Paradise.

The headlong tragedy of the Camp Fire and the destruction of Paradise hold deep lessons for Rim Country, which are detailed in a heart-wrenching, meticulous, 421-page report National Institutes of Standards and Technology.

The 2018 fire in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada was driven by 50-mile-an-hour winds through bone-dry fuels in an area with no significant rainfall in the past 200 days. The fire climbed out of a deep canyon then raced through the overgrown forest. In less than two hours, embers were setting homes on fire in Paradise 7 miles away.

The embers set 30 major spot fires all over Paradise long before the flaming front arrived. The embers set fires all along the evacuation routes. Toppling trees and power poles and sheets of flame trapped people in cars lined up bumper to bumper trying to escape.

Unfortunately, the Camp Fire was not a freak tragedy – but a terrible lesson in the danger confronting forested communities throughout the West.

Americans have been racing to build more homes in the wildland-urban interface (WUI) zone in towns like Payson and Show Low perched on the edge of thick, overgrown, fire-prone forests. The 44 million homes in the wildland-urban interface houses one-third of the U.S. population. But communities like Payson and Pine still lack a WUI building code, enforced Firewise brush-clearing ordinances or defensible evacuation routes.

The Forest Service now spends \$2 billion to \$4 billion each year battling wildfires, but the losses keep growing. The Camp Fire drew in 5,600 firefighters, 900 pieces of equipment and a small air force. But they still couldn't save Paradise, Magalia and Concow. The communities were surrounded by a thick forest that hadn't burned in decades or hadn't been thinned to slow the spread of the flames. Fragmented thinning projects did protect critical infrastructure, but weren't extensive enough to save the com-

Tragedy's Timeline

- 6:25:** Fire reported west side of the Feather River.
- 7:00:** Fire escapes canyon.
- 7:23:** Embers set homes on fire in Concow, three miles from fire start.
- 7:44:** Embers start spot fires in Paradise, 7 miles from fire start.
- 8:30:** 30 spot fires burning in Paradise, some 2 miles inside town limits.
- 8:45:** Embers had started two separate fires 2 miles and 4 miles from the fire front.
- 10:00:** Fires burning on both sides of several evacuation routes, trapping residents.
- 11:00:** 150-foot-long flames block evacuation routes.
- 12:00:** Fire entrenched in canyons on all sides of town.
- 3 p.m.:** Fires burning throughout town and in the downtown area.
- 5 p.m.:** Flaming front reaches Concow, with 50- to 100-foot flame lengths.
- 2 a.m.:** Winds picked up to 50 mph, blowing softball-sized embers into new areas.
- 2-6:44 a.m.:** Fire consuming hundreds of structures in Magalia and Concow. Retreating firefighters have to drive through flames to reach safety zones.

munity in the face of the extreme conditions.

The exhaustive study showed that the town was doomed by the spot fires set by the ember storm, long before the mile-long fire front reached the outskirts of the community. Firefighters emphasized that most of the fires in town were set by embers, which ignited hundreds of homes, parked vehicles, furniture on porches, wooden fences attached to houses, open porches, unscreened attic ventilation openings, bushes against the sides of houses, piles of pine needles on roofs and other hazards. Once embers set a house on fire, the flames could readily spread to close-spaced neighboring houses. Whole blocks burned as the fire spread house to house.

Paradise and Butte County had been talking about fire hazards for years, said the report. They adopted several programs to encourage people to Firewise their homes, adopted an ordinance to allow people to remove larger vegetation without a permit and undertook fuel treatments around schools, the irrigation district and other critical infrastructure – which for the

most part worked to protect those sites.

The county and town also instituted a reverse 911 system to automatically call people with emergency alerts, outfitted streetlights with battery backups, kept streets swept of flammable debris, planned and practiced evacuation procedures and took other steps to prepare for the unthinkable.

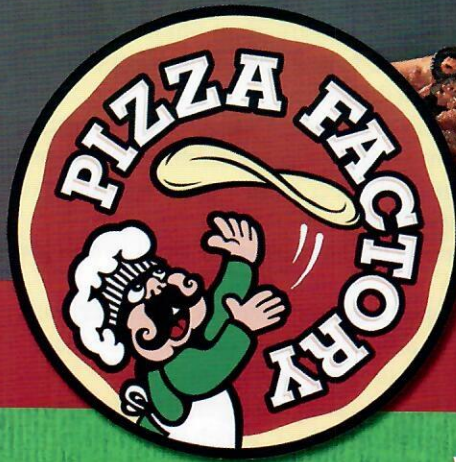


Video courtesy of Laura Anthony/KGO-TV, 17:18. Used with permission.

This image from the camera of a fire truck shows a fire swirl caused by the extreme conditions in Paradise, Calif., where an ember storm set fires seven miles from the fire front and killed 85 people.

But they never adopted a WUI code to require fire-hardening of new construction, didn't clear trees and brush along evacuation routes, didn't mandate Firewise brush clearing, didn't create safety zones where people could shelter in place and tragically underestimated the speed with which the fire would spread – and the devastation of the ember storm.

This publication represents an attempt to apply the lessons of the Camp Fire to Payson and other Rim communities. The lesson is now clear – we have to do our part so that when the ember storm comes, firefighters have a chance to stop the beast.



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Payson embraces Firewise code



Massive California wildfires have prompted the state to adopt fire-adapted building codes.

By Michele Nelson

Payson's bold embrace of a comprehensive Firewise code stemmed from years of effort to educate the public, the persistence of a council-appointed Firewise committee, the quiet efforts of the town's new fire department fuels manager Kevin McCully and a new spirit of council unity.

Council member Chris Higgins after the meeting noted, "That was something ... 7-0 vote and not a single negative public comment."

The town will give property owners lots of time and help in tackling the most dangerous conditions first, without fines or punitive actions. Only when a property owner repeatedly refuses to do anything will the town use enforcement provisions in the ordinance, said Fire Chief David Staub. In extreme cases, the new ordinance allows the town to do critical cleanup work and then place a lien against the property to recover its costs.

Studies have shown that even from a mile away a big wildfire can rain huge, glowing embers down on a town. A Firewise code helps keep the ember storm from setting several houses on fire at once and then spreading the flames from one house to the next.

The fire department continues to work on the second major change needed to reduce the odds of a town-destroying wildfire — a wildland-urban interface (WUI) building code. This would require the use of fire-resistant materials for roofs and siding and fire-adapted building design features on new construction. Studies show the combination of a Firewise brush-clearing code and a WUI building code can help protect a community from a major wildfire.

Observers cited the council's support for hiring McCully as a turning point, as well as placing councilors Jim Ferris and Suzy Tubbs-Avakian on the Firewise committee. They worked with volunteer community members over the last two years to craft a code unique to Payson.

The adopted Firewise code addresses the vegetation on any town property, including land owned by the town.

Decades of research show if a property owner removes the ladder fuels from under trees and clears brush from around the base of the home, the building will have a far better chance of surviving a wildfire.

McCully said if he receives a complaint about a dangerously overgrown property, he first sends a letter to the property owner, which usually gets "good results."

He has more tricks in his bag to escalate the requests for compliance, which he will use "until you get to the point the person is ignoring you."

Only then will McCully raise the possibility of the town invoking the power in the ordinance to clean up the lot and put a lien against the property to cover the cost.

Staub noted, "Our hope is to raise awareness of the risk we live in and teach people to live with wildfire in a healthy way."

Elsa Romanowitz supported the new ordinance. "As a community, we will pay sooner or later. I received a call from one friend whose insurance went up \$800 because of wildfire."

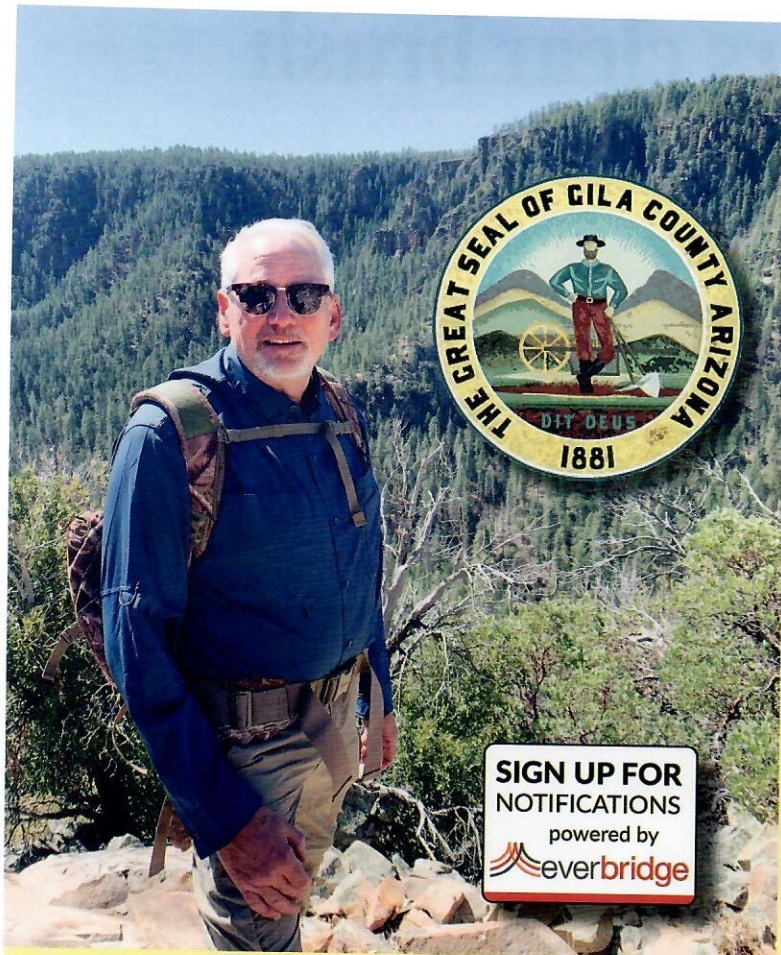
Joe Miller, through his work with Trout Unlimited and the Four Forest Restoration Initiative, reminded the council that living responsibly within the forest "is critical to our way of life."

Dave Golembewski reminded everyone why the Firewise ordinance really matters. "Remember, there is no constitutional right to put your neighbor in danger," he said.



"Our hope is to raise awareness of the risk we live in and teach people to live with wildfire in a healthy way."

Payson Fire Chief
David Staub



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The recent Backbone Fire is just the latest example of agencies united and pulling together to protect life and property: Gila County Government, USDA national forest firefighters from throughout the southwest; state agencies such as ADOT; local, county and state law enforcement coordinated and working together - local fire districts, and town government. All working together for our common safety and common good. Fire, evacuation and the increased danger of flooding are scary, but we must keep a positive thought and a prayerful attitude, try to remain calm and confident that our communities, property, and Rim Country that we love will make it through these emergencies. Trust in the process, and in our professional firefighters and first responders who train constantly for this - and who dedicate their life's work to protecting us. As the smoke clears let's show compassion to those who are displaced, have lost, and are hurting. I'm sorry to say the reality is that this will not be our last fire or emergency, and we must remain resolute in our courage to face the next one - and prepare, as residents and homeowners, to be more ready in our own way by FireWising our homes and property and signing up for emergency alerts. I also urge you to volunteer on your own local level -- donate to your fire district -- get involved with local initiatives such as the Pine Strawberry Fuel Reduction Committee, or Tonto Rim Search and Rescue. As the Rim Country's Gila County Supervisor for District 1, I am proud to support these and other efforts to prepare and protect this land that we love, our communities and home within the Tonto National Forest.

~ Gila County Supervisor Steve Christensen, District 1



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Grants help owners clear brush

By Michele Nelson

The Payson Fire Department can help with all that pesky brush through a Firewise grant, but residents must apply by May 24.

The Wildfire Hazardous Fuels grant will reimburse residents up to 90% of the cost to Firewise their property, if approved.

While the Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management administers the grant, PFD collects the information from residents.

To apply, contact Fuels Manager Kevin McCully through an email to kmccully@paysonaz.gov.

Include the property owner's name, contact information, address, parcel number and number of acres needing treatment.

There are requirements to qualify:

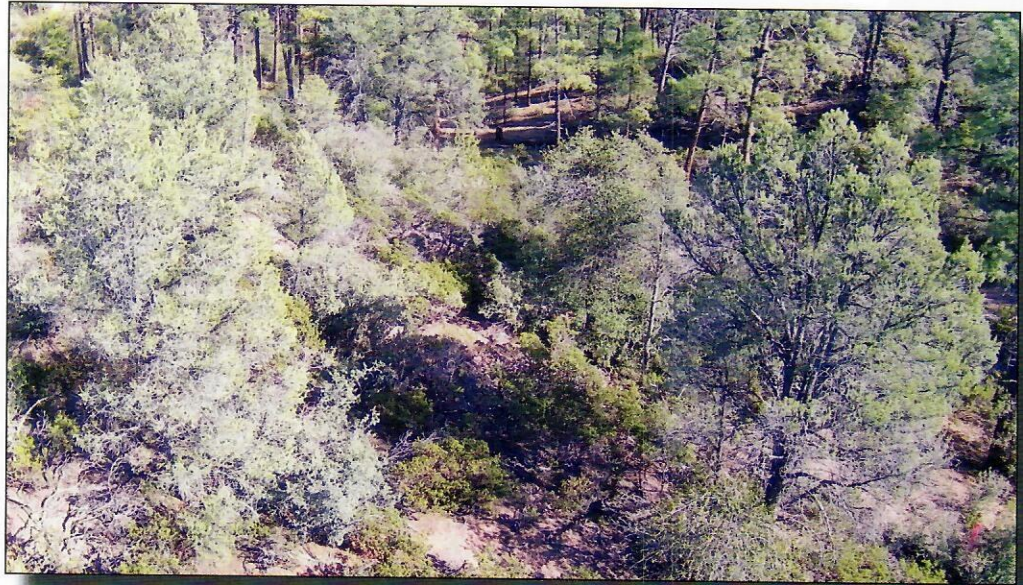
- Only those owners who have not used this grant in the past to Firewise their property may apply.

- The owner must pay for the work up front. Once complete, they will reimburse the owner for 90% of the cost.

- The grant will only cover Firewise work, not the purchase of equipment.

- The grant will not cover any work done before the award of the grant.

Before



And After



If you have brush like the top photo, apply for a Firewise grant through the Payson Fire Department by May 24. The Firewise grant can reimburse up to 90% of the cost to clean up and Firewise property to look like this after picture of the East Gully.

Photos by Kevin McCully

Tour a Firewised neighborhood

By Michele Nelson

Payson Fuels Manager Kevin McCully and Fire Adaptive Committee board member Alan MacKay can quickly take anyone to Payson neighborhoods that illustrate the difference between a well-prepared, survivable neighborhood and a potential death trap.

Some older neighborhoods have narrow streets on which one car can barely pass another.

The two firefighters have seen dangerous traffic snarls during evacuations. Not only does that prevent residents from escaping, but it prevents fire trucks from moving into the neighborhood to protect homes until the evacuation is done — which is often too late to save the homes.

Moreover, in poorly prepared neighborhoods, homeowners have allowed trees to droop over roofs and streets. Leaves,

weeds and grasses grow right up to the sides of some houses. Bushes choke yards.

“People become overwhelmed,” said MacKay.

But the two fire professionals don’t want to scare residents of these neighborhoods. Instead, they seek to reassure them by telling homeowners they “don’t have to clear cut.”

“We want them to remove ladder fuels and prioritize (Firewise),” said MacKay.

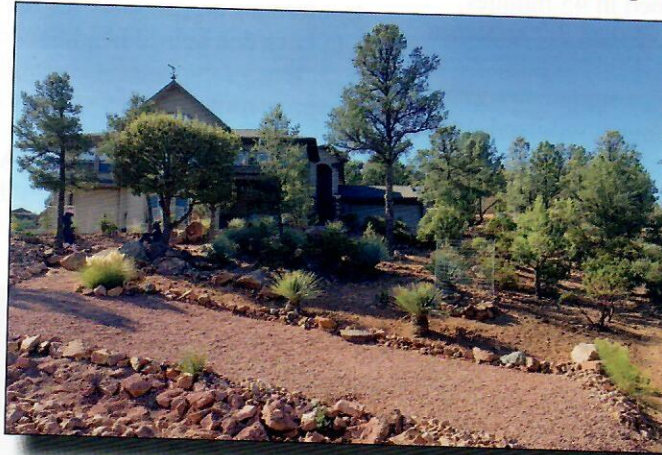
As an example, MacKay and McCully went to one of the newer neighborhoods behind Home Depot. The houses use mostly non-flammable landscaping material such as rocks and local plants.

Weeds are not present.

Bushes and trees have plenty of space between them.

Tree branches are trimmed at least six feet off the ground.

The streets were built to accommodate both cars and fire trucks. MacKay and McCully realize it is a one property at a time proposition to prepare Payson for the next wildfire.



This Firewised home in Payson counters the concern that protecting a home from fires will create a “moonscape.”



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Payson ponders building code

By Michele Nelson

Sidney Morel, a retired fire chief and fire marshal from the San Diego area, has seen wildfire do astonishing things.

"February 10, 2003 – 47 homes burned in 45 minutes," he said of the Cedar Fire. Ultimately, more than 2,000 homes burned to a pile of ash.

By the time the 2007 Witch Creek Fire started, numerous San Diego communities had adopted stringent wildland-urban interface (WUI) building codes and enforced Firewise landscaping.

A friend of Morel's benefited from the changes. He lived in a shelter-in-place community and safely stayed home with his three pets during the Witch Creek Fire. They all survived without a scratch. The only home to burn in his community was a remodel — the wood left outside caught on fire.

Now Morel lives in Rim Country and writes fire protection plans. Despite numerous devastating wildfires in Arizona, little has changed when it comes to WUI building codes.

WUI codes have been on the Payson Town Council agenda for the past 10 years, but the council has adopted only a few minor provisions. There is no brush pickup in Payson like the unincorporated communities of Pine and East Verde Estates.

After the Oakland Hills and Laguna Beach fires burned multi-million dollar homes in densely populated areas in the early 1990s, California passed further building codes requiring all new homes to have siding and roofing that can withstand burning for at least an hour.

"You have to have paper-backed insulation between the joist and roof or siding," said Morel. Attic vents must have screens small enough to withstand embers.

"If an ember hits a screen a quarter inch or larger, it burns down to the size of a matchstick and gets through to set the attic on fire," said Morel.

The vents must also have clips to withstand the winds that accompany wildland fires. Windows must have tinted triple panes.

Deck materials must withstand fires.

"Every new building has sprinklers ... you want to talk about pushback from the building industry," said Morel.

Yet, he made it clear the codes do not require a homeowner

to upgrade an older home.

"The big fear when you start talking about WUI codes is retrofitting," he said. "It's only for new construction."

Over the years, Morel has watched the evolution of California's preparations for fire carefully, noting the ordinances and laws that helped neighbors enforce codes against neighbors.

"One of the biggest issues, I do everything right for wildfire protection and then embers from my neighbor start my house on fire," he said.

Neighbor apathy concerns Morel when people start to talk about shelter-in-place. "Here's the key: How do I get my neighbor to comply?" he said.



Paradise, California, did not have a WUI building code. This made it possible for the ember storm from a wildfire more than four miles away to set houses on fire all over town long before the flaming front reached the community. Moreover, the ember storm set fire to closely set trees and power poles along evacuation routes, blocking residents as they fled.

Homeowners associations, town ordinances and education help. Morel preferred working with cities, because the building inspector could hold residents responsible.

"But the most effective pressure on people came from insurance companies.

As homeowner insurance claims due to natural disasters increased, the industry created the Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety (IBHS). The IBHS controlled envi-

ronments to re-create natural disasters, such as wildfires and hurricanes. IBHS then built homes and watched how materials performed.

Morel has participated in the controlled experiments that build a home then subject it to the ember storms created by wildfires. (<https://disastersafety.org/>)

These controlled experiments have shown that adding fire protection in the valley of roofs staves off spot fires in the leaves and pine needles that collect in those low spots.

"We know that is where debris is held and embers will land," said Morel. "We require protection ... you have to have a class 8 roof ... for those houses built after 2003."

Building according to WUI code and landscaping to Firewise standards lowers insurance rates. Morel had insurance agents meet him at homes to determine if it had "wildland fire survivability."

But it's also the small things that can make a huge difference when a wildfire races through a community. "Put your trash cans in the garage," said Morel. "We know it's these little things that burn the house down."

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Experts help residents assess risk

By Michele Nelson

Big name. Bigger impact.

The Fire Adaptive Community Committee has moved mountains of bureaucracy – and brush – to make Payson safe.

And they're still hacking away at conditions that studies show make Payson more vulnerable to a catastrophic wildfire than was Paradise, California – before it mostly burned the ground, killing 85 residents.

The committee's mission is to assist the Town of Payson Fire Department adapt Payson to living within the wildland-urban interface.

The group already has a large feather in its cap – the passage of a Firewise ordinance by the Payson Town Council.

Now, the committee also has trained volunteers to do a Firewise risk assessment for homeowners – highlighting vulnerable areas. Homeowners can call the Payson Fire Department to get a free assessment of their property.

Firewise focuses on the landscaping and downed duff around a home to control fires during an ember storm.

For years, the FACC worked and re-worked an ordinance that empowers the town to hold property owners accountable for clearing and cleaning up their yards. Now, the committee's working on a WUI building code.

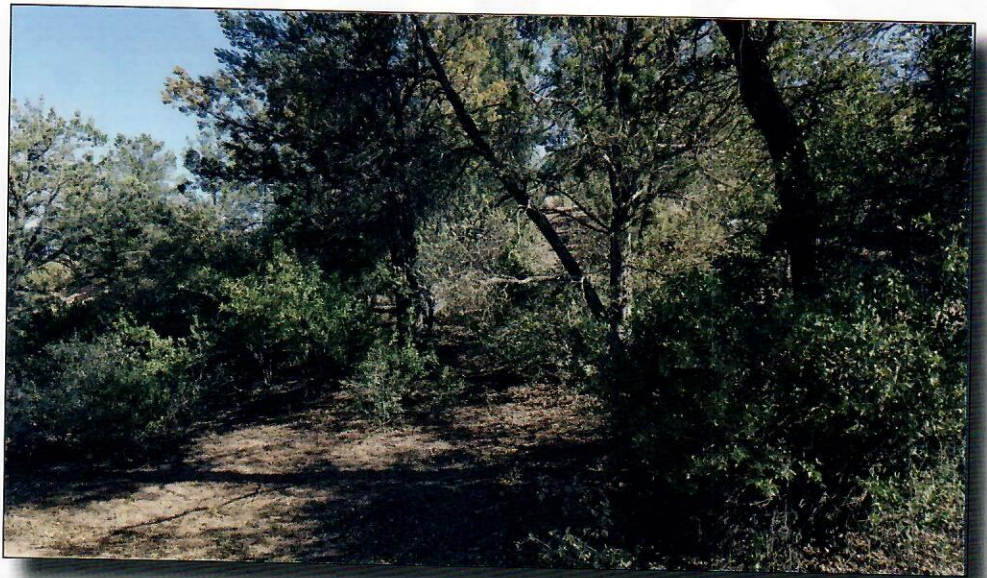
FACC works closely with **Kevin McCully, the fuels manager for the PFD.** He prefers to use the carrot of education rather than the stick of enforcement.

"Most of the problems come from out-of-town property owners," he said.

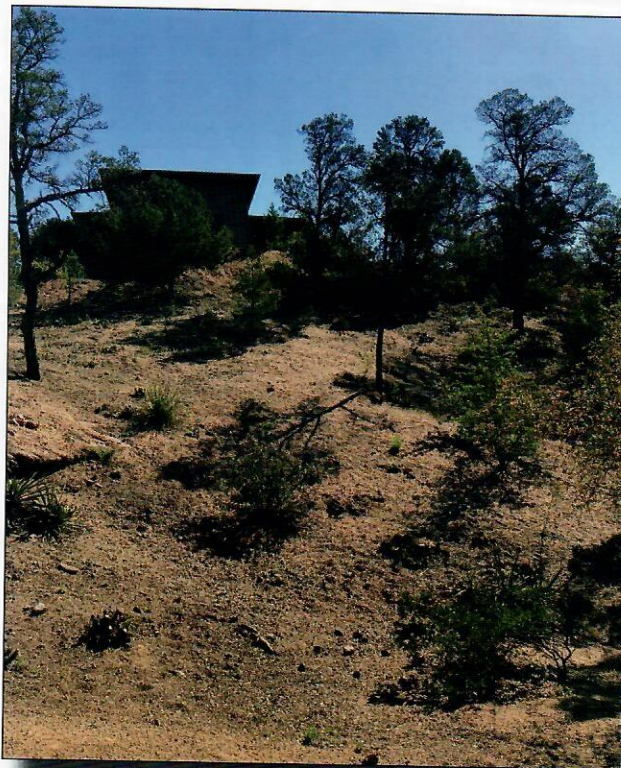
The FACC is always looking for more volunteers. The committee has set up several committees to tackle the problem. Committees include public education and outreach, helping people with health, financial or physical limitations clear their property and risk assessment.

"The FACC has many other volunteer opportunities depending on your giftedness and time availability," said FACC member Shirley Dye.

Please call Dye at 928-951-6774, or the Payson Fire Department at 928-474-5242, for more information.



Photos courtesy Kevin McCully, Payson Fire



These pictures show the transformation in a Payson home following a thinning project to a Firewise standard. The treatment removed the thickets of brush but left even the small trees standing. Studies show that such thinning projects reduce the odds the house will burn in an ember storm by about 82%. To get a free assessment of your home's risk, call the Payson Fire Department.



Keith Morris

Gila County operates a brush pit to dispose of biomass created by clearing brush from around homes to reduce the chance they'll burn in the ember storm of a wildfire. Studies show that clearing brush around and between homes can dramatically reduce the damage from embers, which can rain down four miles from the actual fire.

Getting rid of all that brush ...

By Michele Nelson

So now you've got all that brush from cleaning up and firewising the yard.

Where will you get rid of it?

Rim Country has thought of this need and created two brush pits, one near Star Valley and the other closer to Pine. Volunteers run the pits, which only open on the weekends during the summer.

The brush pits only accept green vegetation waste. That includes all forms of brush, pine needles, cones, leaves and tree branches. Pits will not accept tree trunks over 6 inches in diameter or tree root balls.

The brush pits do not allow household garbage or construction materials such as wood or metal, dimensional lumber, plywood products, roofing materials, etc. Nothing with nails will be accepted. If any leaves or needles are in plastic bags, they must be emptied and plastic bags taken home.

Near Star Valley, the Blattner Brush Pit is about eight miles east of the Highway 87 and Highway 260 intersection in Payson.

The turn off to the Blattner Pit is on the south side of Highway 260 at milepost 259.7. It is just west of the "Elk Crossing" location with all the flashing lights and signs.

Once on the dirt road south of Highway 260, stay right for approximately .5 miles.

Blattner Pit opened on Saturday, April 10.

Hours are from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday.

There are a few weekends that Blattner Pit will not open.

MAY 29th WEEKEND

JULY 4th WEEKEND

SEPTEMBER 11th WEEKEND

Blattner Pit will close for the season on Oct. 30, 2021

For more information please see the Blattner Pit website at <https://mvppofaz.org/>

The Pine Brush Pit serves the communities of Pine Strawberry. The Pine Strawberry Fuel Reduction Committee funds, staffs and maintains the Pine Brush pit.

The pit is open Sundays from 8 am to 4 pm, from March through November every year, weather permitting.

The Pine Brush Pit is located on the Control Road – east off Highway 87 at milepost 268 then go east for 3/4 miles. Turn south at the sign and go approximately .1 miles to the pit.

For more information go to the Pine Strawberry Fuel Reduction Committee website at <https://psfuelreduction.org/programs/pine-brush-pit/>

East Verde Estates focused on safety

Community lands grant to continue Firewise efforts

By Peter Aleshire

East Verde Estates residents are on the ball when it comes to being Firewise, but there's still a lot of work to do.

The East Verde Park (EVP) community faces a great risk from wildfires approaching from the west out Crackerjack Road.

A powerline cut just to the west of the community's back entrance became seriously overgrown, but APS just completed a thorough treatment of the area, thus creating a fire barrier between the forest and EVP.

However, the unincorporated community has a small property tax assessment and a fire district, which has focused on Firewising homes. The community contracts with Payson Fire for fire protection – but also pays for two brush pickups annually. That decision has spurred homeowners to Firewise their homes and removed tons of brush from the community every year.

The community recently learned that it had also landed a \$90,000 grant to further its Firewising efforts.

The brush pickup program makes all the difference say homeowners. Many can thin brush on their properties or hire

someone to do it – but hauling the piles of brush to the burn pits makes it hard for most to keep on top of the problem. But now people time their thinning efforts to the twice-annual brush pickup.


The community also lobbies the Forest Service and Arizona Public Service to undertake thinning projects on the edges of the community. APS has now cleared what amounts to a community firebreak along its transmission lines on the edge of the community.

Meanwhile, the Forest Service has in recent years cleared breaks on the ridgelines overlooking the community as well as along Crackerjack Road. The thinning projects prevent an approaching fire from jumping from treetop to treetop – forcing it to drop to the ground where firefighters can stop it before it reaches the roughly 300 homes in the community.

Meanwhile, the ongoing efforts to clear brush in the community driven by the free, twice-annual pickups will help prevent embers from starting fires within the community – which could then spread rapidly from house to house without the ongoing, homeowner thinning.

Meanwhile, the activities of both the fire board and a volunteer Firewise committee ensure residents remain aware of the need to thin brush, check gutters and remove hazards on their properties, clean gutters and create a defensible space.

Unfortunately, few of the other incorporated or unincorporated communities in Rim Country offer free brush pickups.



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Focus on fire-safe communities

The cloud of 2020's pandemic precautions and Covid-cancellations did have at least one local silver lining: Gila County Cooperative Extension kept on teaching and archived a trove of content online over the past 15 months. County Extension Agent Chris Jones hosted a weekly series of gardening, horticulture and environmental awareness webinars – including topics below that are particularly relevant now, in the aftermath of the Backbone and Telegraph fires. They're all archived and viewable at your convenience at extension.arizona.edu/garden-country-extension-webinar-series.

Social media offers a great way to connect with Cooperative Extension, too. For invites, updates (even helpful tips on parenting and personal finance), like and follow [facebook.com/gilaextension](https://www.facebook.com/gilaextension)

Firewise webinar topics include:

Ready, Set, Go! – Fire Preparedness (May 2020). The Ready, Set, Go! Program provides information for residents and property owners on how they can successfully be prepared in the event of a wildland fire. Kevin McCully explains Rim Country's wildfire threat and describes more about the wildland-urban interface (WUI), an area which is not only limited to forest vegetation.

Wildfire Mitigation, Preparedness, Response, and Recovery: An Emergency Management Perspective (October 2020). Over the past five years, Gila County has faced record-breaking wildfire activity. Gila County Emergency Manager Carl Melford discusses how a network of safety partners deals with the challenges that come with wildfire season.

When the Smoke Clears – The Road to Recovery Following Large-Scale Wildfire (July 2020). Carol Ekarius explains first steps toward recovery, such as anticipating flood conditions and debris flows, working collaboratively on response by forming a recovery committee, figuring out how to pay for it, and thinking about long-term recovery.

Woodbury Fire Ecology Report (November 2020). USDA Forest Service Fire Ecologist Dr. Mary Lata discusses her fire ecology report and the impacts and implications the Woodbury Fire has for local land management. Among the largest wildfires in Arizona history, there are lessons learned and key management options to pursue. According to Dr. Lata, "Many of the undesirable fire effects that did occur, did so not because of decisions made in the last few months, or even years, but because of the culmination of human impacts over the last century or so. The Tonto National Forest will need to make some difficult decisions on how to manage the Sonoran Desert in years such as this one when the desert is functionally a grass/shrub system in which fire is frequent rather than a desert ecosystem in which fire is rare."

Payson's New Fire Adapted Community Town Code (September 2020). The newly adopted code addresses the vegetation on all properties within town limits, including land owned by the town. Payson's Fuel Manager Kevin McCully discusses what the code entails and how residents can participate.



These images from a Gila County Cooperative Extension webinar available online show some of the ways embers from a distant wildfire can claim a home – including unscreened vents and debris against a wall (top), flammable material on a porch (below) and flower beds and window flower boxes against the house (bottom).



Emergency preparedness: The first 72 hours are on you

By Gila County Supervisor Steve Christensen

Ferocious fires recently closed the Beeline Highway and State Route 260, reminding many of us of the value of an evacuation plan.

Do you have an evacuation plan? What will you do if basic services such as water, gas, electricity or phones stop working? What would you do if stranded in your vehicle, no cell service to call for help – and local responders unable to help right away?



Your Checklist

Get started today with this short checklist:

- Did I put the home emergency supply kit together in appropriate carrying bags/containers?
- Did I put an emergency supply kit in each family vehicle?
- Are the kits properly located and stored for easy access?
- Are the kits complete enough for the whole family and all special needs individuals?
- Do I know where to get all the materials I need for the kits?
- If I have done all of the above, have I rotated the contents of my kit in the last six months?

Unfortunately, emergencies often occur without warning, allowing little or no time for you and your family to plan and stay safe.

Gila County Office of Public Health Emergency Preparedness encourages Rim Country residents to take the initiative and plan ahead and prepare emergency kits for your home, pets and vehicles. Preparation will significantly reduce discomfort should a widespread disaster occur.

The first 72 hours after a disaster are critical.

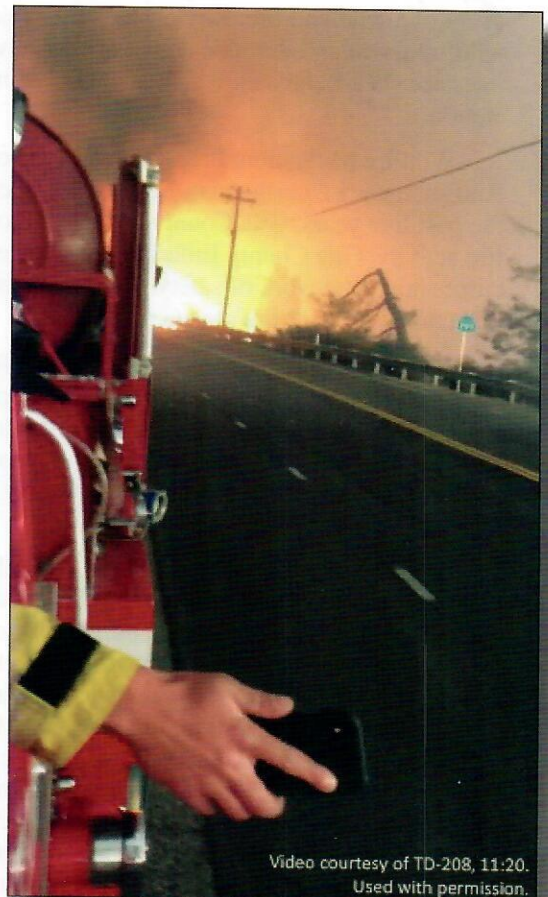
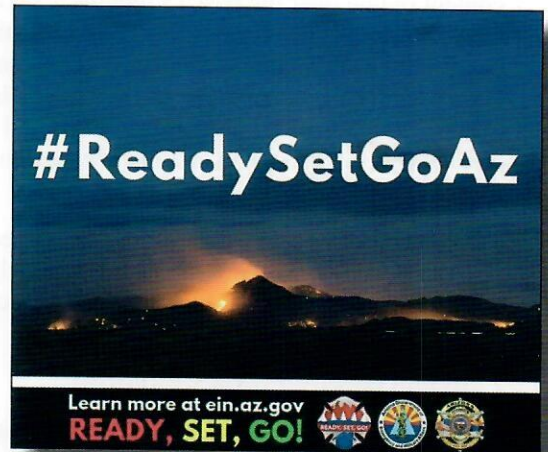
Electricity, gas, water and telephones may not be working. In addition, your local first responders may not be able to reach you immediately during a serious crisis. Each person should be prepared to be self-sufficient – able to live without running water, electricity and/or gas, and phones – for at least three days following a disaster. And it may be up to you to take care of your family, friends, and neighbors

until help arrives.

Keep the following on hand and ready to stay or go in backpacks or duffel bags stored in air tight containers. Periodically rotate the following supplies to keep them fresh:

- Non-perishable food (three-day supply per person)
- Clothing
- Water
- First-aid kit
- Flashlight
- Radio
- Extra batteries
- One blanket per person
- Hand sanitizer
- Toilet paper, etc.
- Family documents
- Medications
- Cash
- Supplies for infants
- Flashlight, first-aid kit, and an emergency blanket in each vehicle

Whether you decide to stay put in an emergency or evacuate to a safer location, you will also need to plan for your pets. Basic supplies include non-perishable food and pet tags with your phone number.



The ember storm from the Paradise Fire set the forest on fire along escape routes, trapping residents. Here a firefighter snaps a picture of the flames that block the evacuation route.

BLATTNER Brush Pit

- ✓ **Please help protect our communities and wonderful forest. Do your part to clean up and firewise your properties**
- ✓ **Payson Fire Dept and the Blattner Brush Pit are here to help Payson residents and surrounding communities!**
- ✓ **The Blattner Brush Pit is a free service to the Payson and surrounding communities. We are a 501c3 non profit organization and do accept donations for upkeep of the pit**
- ✓ **The brush pit is east of Star Valley just off the 260 @ mile marker 259, just follow the signs. Open 8-4 Saturdays, Closed holiday weekends. We accept leaves, needles, brush and limbs up to 36" in diameter. NO stumps or construction material.**
- ✓ **All this material is turned into biofuel for the Novo Biopower Plant in Snowflake, AZ**
- ✓ **This is a win win for both Payson and surrounding communities**
- ✓ **We are always looking for volunteers to help with this great community project. We work in 4 hour shifts.**
- ✓ **We want to thank our neighbors for firewising their properties**
- ✓ **If you have any questions please call Frank @ 928-978-8765**

**Mogollon Valley
Pit Program Inc.
228 N Coyote Way
Payson AZ 85541**

**Frank Aspeslagh
928-978-8765**



Illustrations courtesy University of Arizona Cooperative Extension and California College of Agriculture, Biotechnology and Natural Resources Wildfire Home Retrofit Guide.

Start now to prepare for embers

By Peter Aleshire

Get ready now.

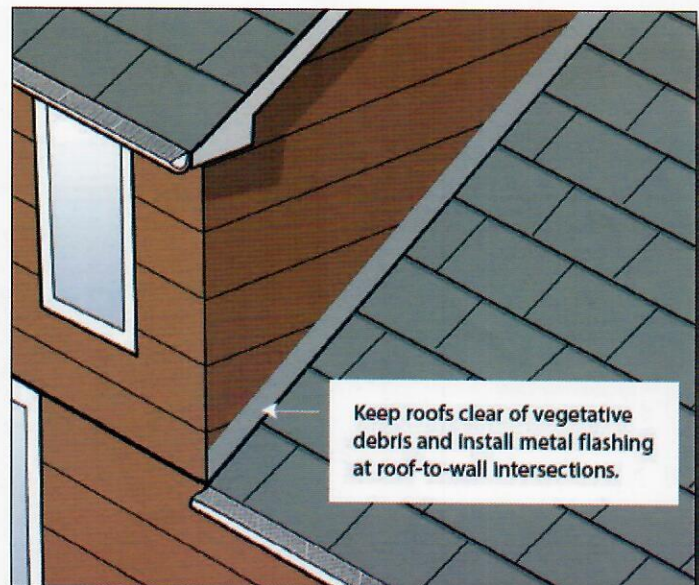
Because by the time the ember storm hits, you won't have time.

That's the message that emerged from a sobering webinar on preparing your home for a wildfire, put on by the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension.

"It's going to swirl up and go into eddies in the lee side of your building and create piles of embers," said moderator Chris Jones of the ember storm created by even the close approach of a wildfire. "That's where they can start a small fire and the fire gets bigger and they're able to destroy the home."

A megafire can throw softball sized embers up to a mile ahead of the fire line. Mostly the embers rain down as small chunks of glowing wood – or flurries of sparks.

Mostly, the webinar focused on steps homeowners can





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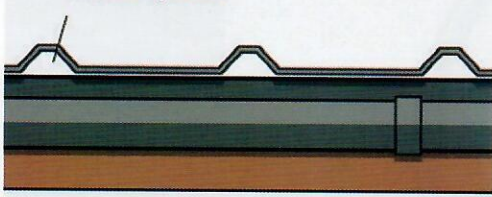
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METAL ROOF

Fill this space with a noncombustible material, such as a mineral wool insulation product

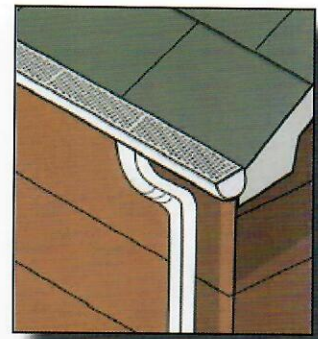
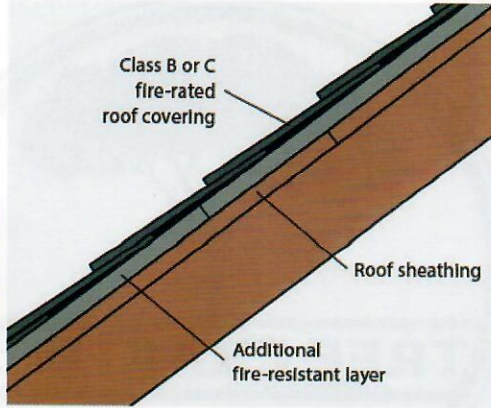


CLASS A "BY ASSEMBLY" FIRE-RATED ROOF COVERING

Class B or C fire-rated roof covering

Roof sheathing

Additional fire-resistant layer



Install and maintain non-combustible gutter cover to prevent leaves from accumulating.

take to protect their homes from such an ember storm – both long before the fire starts and as the flames approach.

“A hot fire can loft material up – much larger pieces of material that are burning. It can carry these materials a mile away – certainly a quarter of a mile,” said Jones. “It is the most common way that houses catch on fire during wildfires – from the embers rather than a flaming front from a burning forest.”

Such an ember storm can easily set several homes on fire at once, quickly overwhelming fire departments. Flames can spread readily to neighboring houses.

Preparing for that ember storm can not only save your home, it can save the whole block. Unfortunately, you still face

potential disaster if a neighbor hasn't taken those precautions or left thickets of brush against the house and between homes.

Cities and counties can reduce this risk by adopting Firewise codes, which require homeowners to keep dangerous concentrations of brush cleared – protecting both their own home and the neighborhood.

Ultimately, protection from an approaching ember storm requires cities and counties to embrace fire-adapted building codes. These codes don't add much to the cost of a new home, but do incorporate protective designs for things like porches, attics, roofs, building materials and other weak points when the ember storm hits.



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Survival Checklist:

Get rid of wood shingles. Metal and tile are fire resistant – so are composite asphalt shingles also resist heat and fire effectively.

Plug all roof openings – like ventilation into attic spaces or nooks and crannies under the eaves. Anyplace a bird might nest.

Replace plastic skylights with tempered double pain glass.

Cover all exterior vents – including drier vents. Use quarter-inch, corrosion-resistant materials – vents or wire mesh.

Use caulk to plug gaps in siding where embers could lodge.

Move woodpiles at least 30 feet from the house.

Replace thin wood decks in poor condition with thicker, high-density hardwoods or plastic composites. Use skirting to keep embers from landing under the porch. Put metal flashing between the deck and the house so embers that pile up in corners won't ignite the house.

If a fire is approaching, move patio chairs with flammable cushions, propane tanks, door mats inside or at least 30 feet from the house.

Remove window flower boxes, which can catch embers. Keep flower beds at least five feet from the house and use non-combustible mulch.

Enclose open eaves with plywood.

Close openings under the garage door and keep door closed.

Roll up car windows if a fire threatens and make sure they're parked either in a closed, covered garage or at least 30 feet from the house.

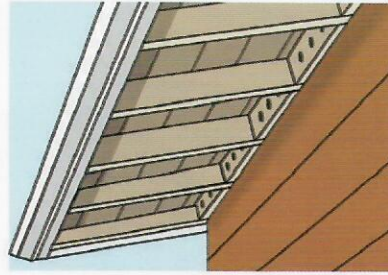
Replace plastic garbage cans with metal cans with tight-fitting lids.

Replace wooden fences that connect to the house. Keep at least a five foot, non-flammable gap between the fence and the house and remove flammable debris or leaves from the base of the fence.

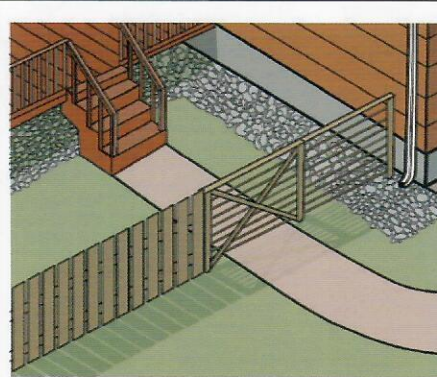
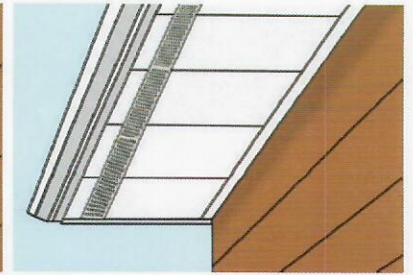
Regularly clean out gutters and portions of the roof where leaves or pine needles can collect. Cut tree branches that overhang house.

Enclose underside of roof rafters and cover attic ventilation openings with non combustible material – like a fine metal mesh.

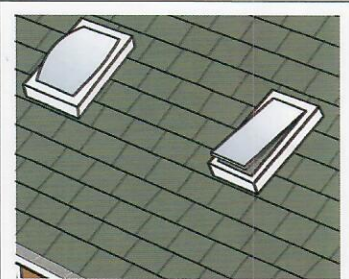
OPEN EAVE



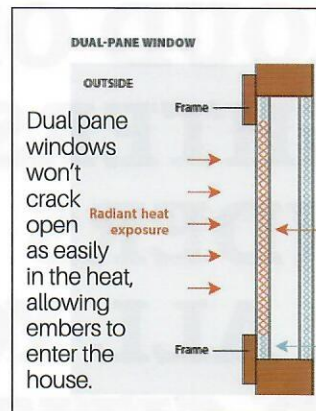
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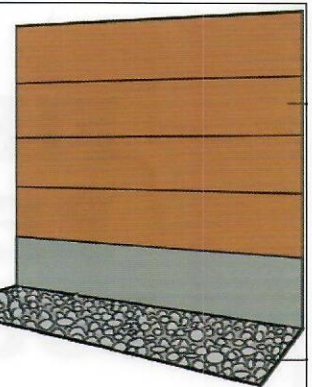
Separate wooden fence from house with fire proof metal fence. Keep base of fence and house free from debris and flammable plants.



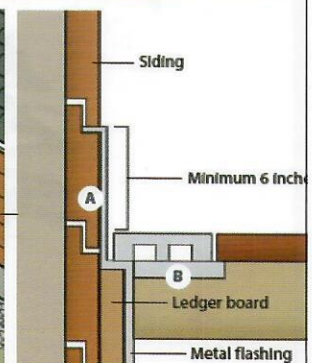
Clear debris around skylights, close before leaving and replace plastic with glass.



If possible, use combustion resistant siding material. Make sure you have a six inch concrete foundation at ground level and place something like grave ground cover at the base of the wall.



Fire harden your porch with metal flashing against the house, fire resistant deck and skirting or fire proof base and underside.



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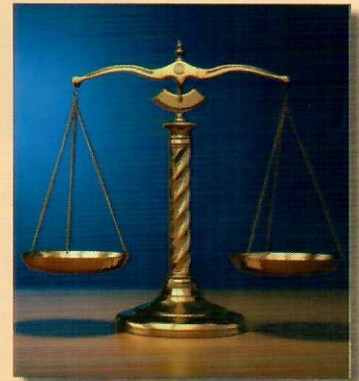
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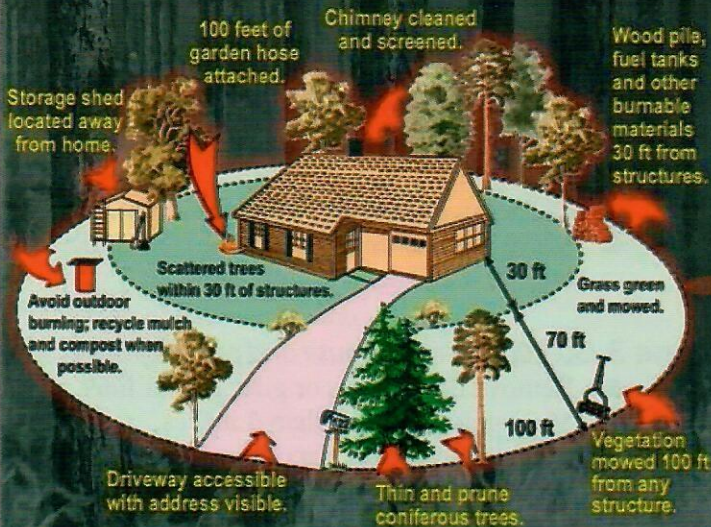
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Are you Firewise?

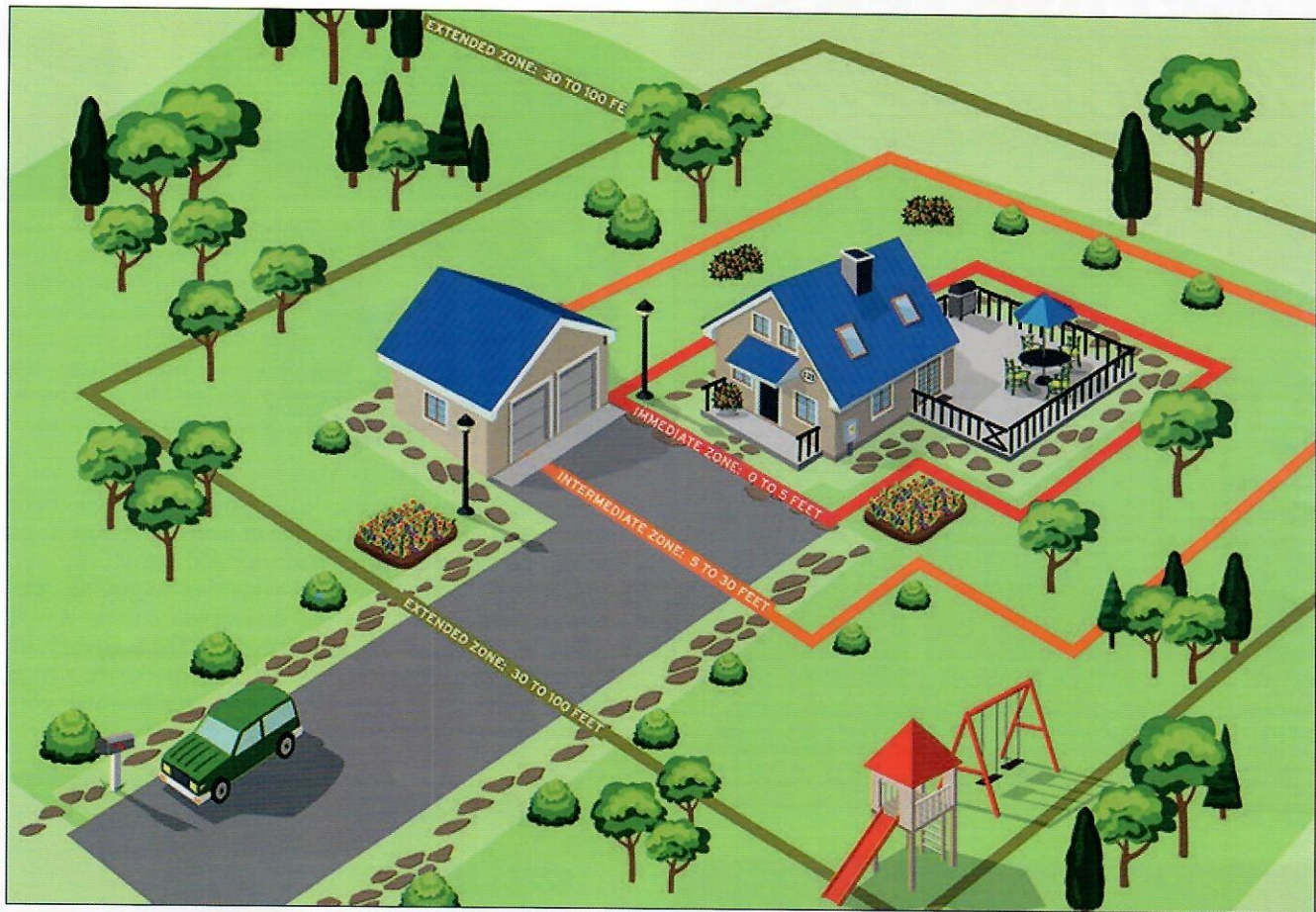


Did you know that there have been Over 1000 wild fires in AZ this year, and that the number is only growing. On top of that 40 people died last year and this is sad but preventable. Our company specializes in firewising and we are here to help people! Pine needles, extra brush, felled limbs all contribute to wild fire dangers cause by lightning most of the time.

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Get ready with defensible space



Reduce the chance that the ember storm will set your house on fire by creating three zones of defensible space around the home. Also, ensure firefighters can defend your home by ensuring address numbers are clearly visible, clearing brush from any access road more than 150 feet long and clearing any obstructions like tree limbs over the road to at least 13.6 feet.

Zone 1 (within five feet of the house):

- Clean roofs, gutters of dead leaves, pine needles.
- Repair loose or missing roof shingles or tiles.
- Install 1/8 inch metal mesh on all vents.
- Ensure you have a property chimney cap.
- Trim branches at least 10 feet from roof and chimney.
- Clear anything flammable.
- Move firewood piles outside zone.
- Remove anything flammable under decks, porches.
- Use non-wood, low growing shrubs, succulents or other fire-resistant plants.

Zone 2 (5-20 feet from house and property line):

- Clear vegetation 10 feet from propane tanks.

- Mow grasses to four inches or less.
- Remove leaf litter and debris.
- Remove ladder fuels from beneath trees.
- Prune tree branches within six feet of the ground.
- For trees lower than 18 feet, trim to one-third the height above ground.
- Space trees 10 feet between crowns (40 trees per half acre).
- Cluster trees to create space between clusters.
- Move trailers, cars, RVs, flammable structures outside the zone.

Zone 3 (30-200 feet from house and property line):

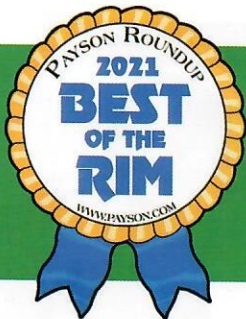
- Remove deep layers or piles of leaf litter.
- Mow grasses to less than 4 inches.
- Remove dead plants and trees.
- Remove small conifers growing between larger trees.
- Remove vegetation from around sheds and structures.
- Ensure trees have separation between canopy tops.

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DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY OUTREACH

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What to do before flames arrive



- Sign up for Everbridge: readygila.com/everbridge.
- Create defensible space.
- Create and rehearse household action plan, including communications, evacuation and plan for the pets and animals.
- Designate emergency meeting location in another area.
- Plan alternative evacuation routes.
- Buy and practice use of fire extinguishers



- Show everyone electrical and gas shutoffs.
- Assemble Go Kit in home and vehicle, including emergency contact numbers, portable radio or scanner.
- Assemble pet Go Kit with food, meds, water, vaccination records.
- Appoint out of area friend as contact person for the whole family.
- Contact Gila County at 928-404-8888 for large-animal evacuations or visit www.gilacountyaz.gov.

What's in the Go Kit:

- Three gallons of water/ person, three days nonperishable food.
- First aid kit, toilet paper, baby wipes.
- Flashlight, batteries, radio.
- Extra car keys, credit cards, cash and meds.
- Extra eyeglasses, contacts, prescriptions.
- Contact numbers, key documents, insurance information.
- Evacuation route maps.
- Portable valuables, irreplaceable items.
- Keep old shoes, flashlight handy for evacuation at night.



John and Dana Haggart prepare a Go Kit. The couple needed only minutes to leave the house once authorities initiated an evacuation order.

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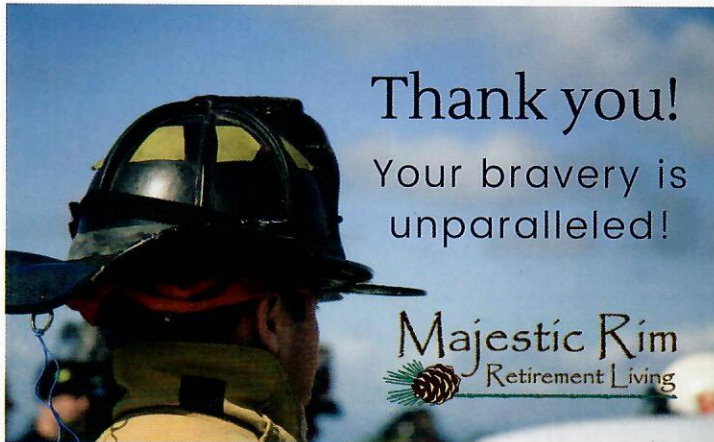
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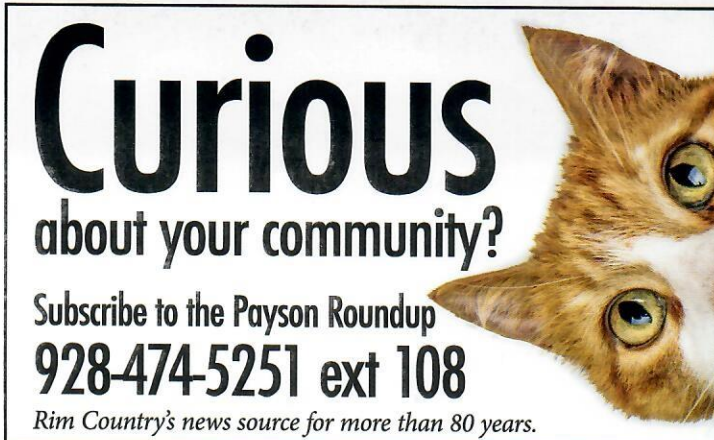
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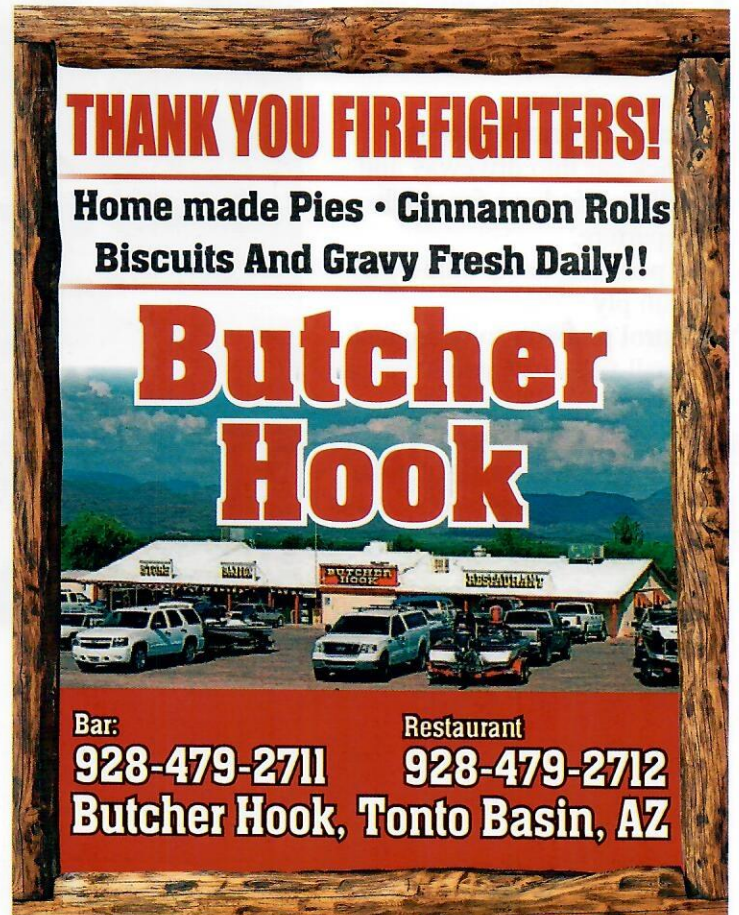


Curious

about your community?

Subscribe to the Payson Roundup
928-474-5251 ext 108

Rim Country's news source for more than 80 years.



Set: Preparations to evacuate

Your “set” checklist:

- Monitor weather, fire conditions.
- Alert household and neighbors.
- Dress in cotton clothes, work boots, with goggles, bandana or particle mask handy.
- Check Go Kit, keep it handy.
- Remain close to home, fed and hydrated.
- Close all windows and doors.
- Remove shades and curtains, leave blinds open – but close metal blinds.
- Move furniture away from windows.
- Turn off pilot lights and air conditioning.
- Leave lights on.
- Move outside flammable items away from house (i.e., patio furniture).
- Turn off propane tanks and gas at the meter.
- Don't leave sprinklers or water running.
- Leave exterior lights on.
- Back car into driveway and roll up windows for quick departure.
- If possible, cover attic vents with plywood.
- Patrol property to extinguish small fires until you have to leave.
- If you haven't done it already, sign up for Everbridge, Gila County's Emergency System, 928-402-8811.





Gila County Cooperative Extension

The mission of Arizona Cooperative Extension is to engage people through applied research and education to improve lives, families, communities and the environment in Arizona and beyond.

We provide educational programs in Gila County:

- Home Horticulture & Pests
- Master Gardener Programs
 - Environment & Sustainability
 - 4-H Clubs
- Youth Leadership & Development
- Ag Awareness & Literacy
 - Animal Science
 - Range Management/ Monitoring
- Financial Education
- Forest Health/Fire Wise
- Parenting, Nutrition & Literacy Programs
- Developmental Sensory Screening

Range Monitoring and Animal Science

Forest Health

Environmental Sustainability and Horticulture

4-H Youth Development



Federally Recognized Tribal Extension Programs

Family Health and Consumer Sciences



Cooperative Extension is in more than 100 colleges and universities that comprise the nation's Land-Grant University System. In addition, it has an office in or near most of the nation's approximately 3,000 counties.

For more information about Gila County Cooperative Extension, please call (928) 474-4160.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Ed Martin, Interim Director of Cooperative Extension, College of Agriculture Life Sciences, The University of Arizona. The University of Arizona is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution. The university does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or genetic information in its programs and activities.

Go: Don't hesitate - don't forget

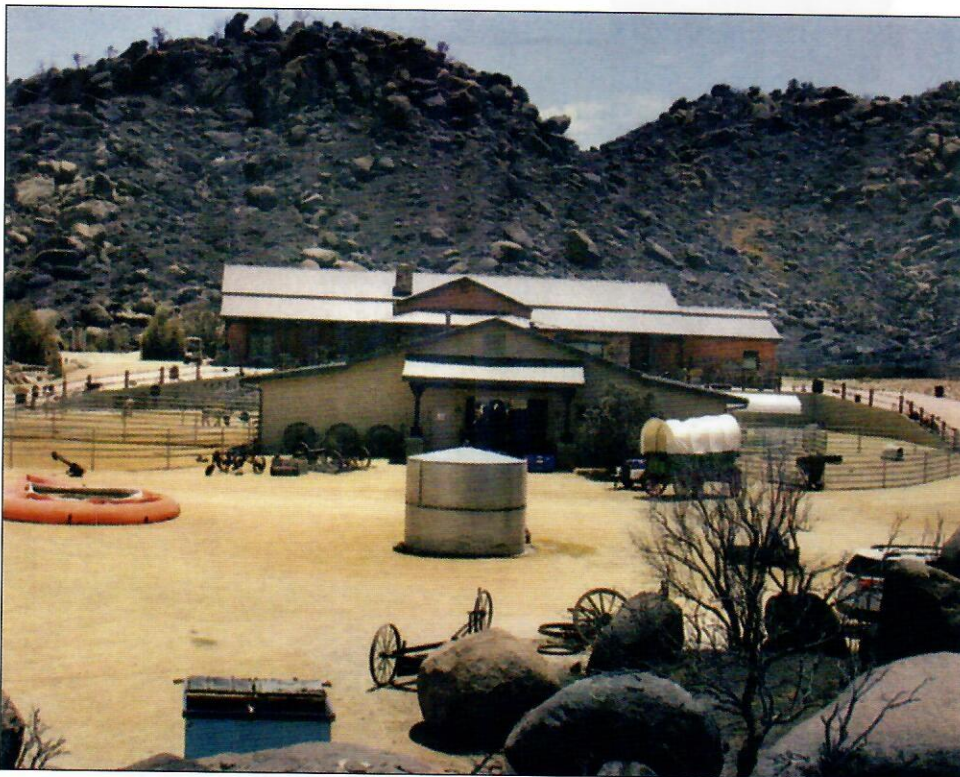
Your "go" checklist:

- Leave early – don't wait for order.
- Don't hesitate once you get the order.
- Go to a planned location outside evacuation area.
- Have several routes to safe area.
- Take your Go Kit.
- Remember the 8 "P's"
 - People and pets
 - Pictures and photo albums
 - PCs
 - Papers
 - Prescriptions
 - Plastics (credit cards)
 - Personal electronic devices
 - Chargers
 - Passports and IDs



Photo courtesy of TD-041, 09:04 (Nov 10).
Used with permission.

The Paradise Fire created an ember storm that set parked cars on fire, trapping people who waited too long to evacuate.



This Yarnell ranch owner did everything right by creating defensible space and fire hardening the house against embers. The owner and his animals rode out the Yarnell Hill Fire. Tragically, the 19 Granite Mountain Hot Shots who died were trying to reach the safety of this well prepared ranch house when they were trapped in dense chaparral that hadn't burned in 50 years.

If you're trapped:

- Call 911.
- Stay in home, away from walls until fire passes.
- Patrol house for spot fires to extinguish.
- Wear long sleeves, bandana of natural fibers.
- Stay hydrated.
- Maintain exits (but it's four times hotter outside).
- Fill sinks and tubs.
- Place wet towels under doors.
- After fire passes, check roof and attic.



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We are grateful for all that you do!

-Colleen Russell & Ruth Rand

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Thank you Firefighters!

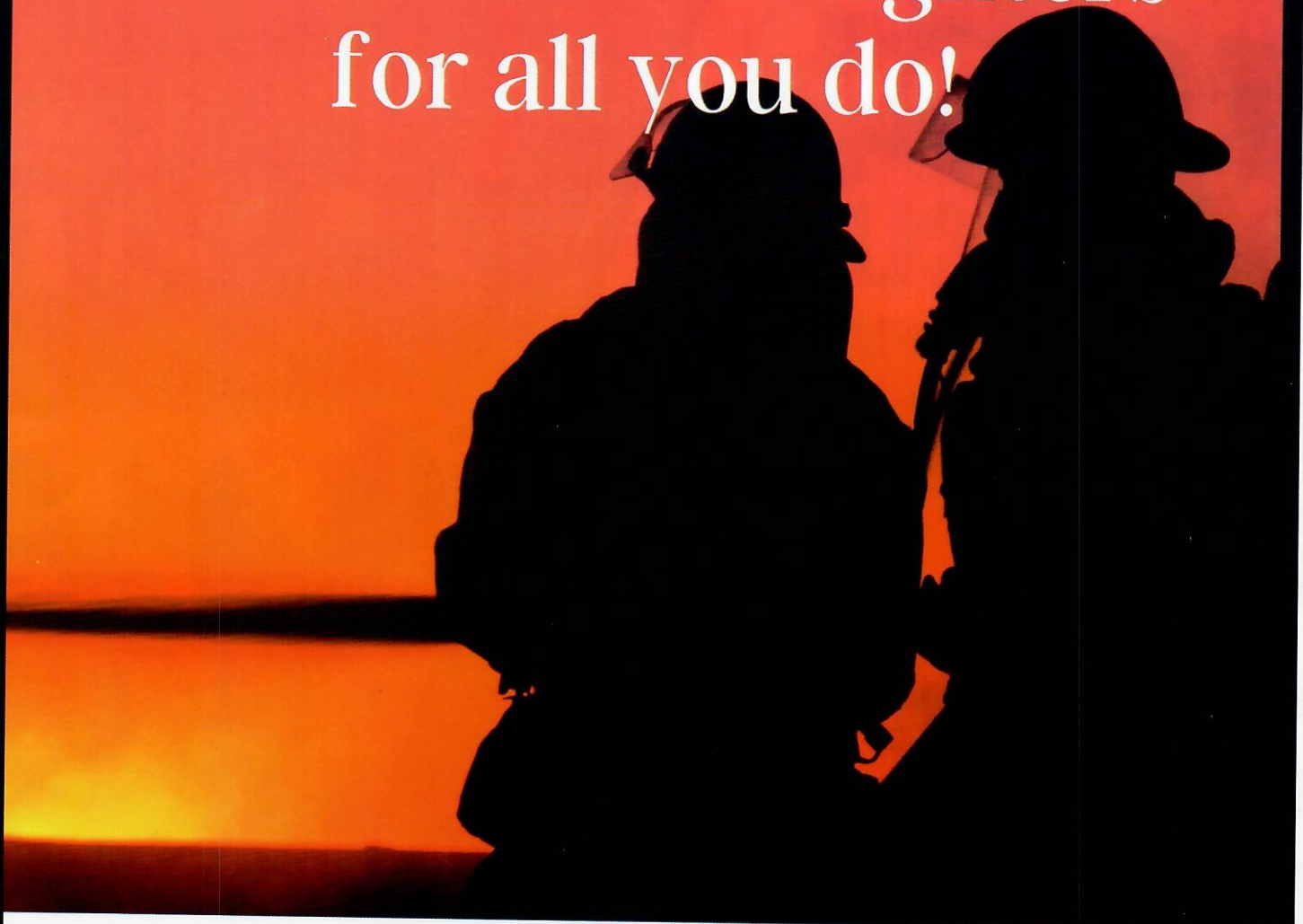
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Investment

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www.ramborealty.com

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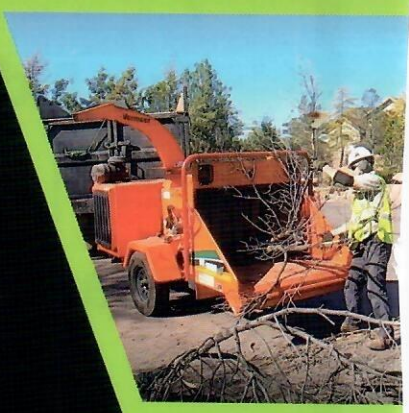
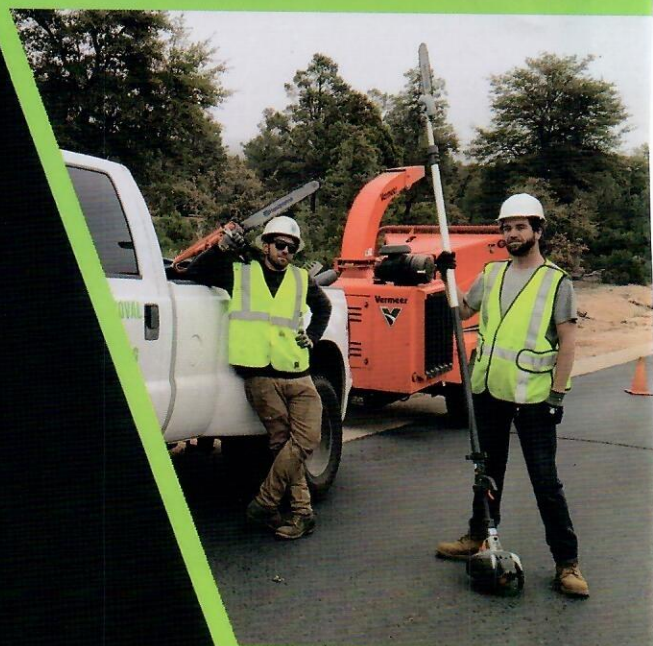
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- Safety Trained

Preparing your home by clearing dead vegetation and overgrowth could save your property, your belongings, and ultimately your life. The Town of Payson has introduced new regulations, that if followed will help keep your home and family safe in the event of a major wildfire.



Schedule Appointment Now | Call 928-978-7389