WILDFIRES: ARE YOU READY?

It is a well-known fact in California, and the Central Coast, that Wildfire Season is from December 1st to November 30th, 12 months of the year. In other words, Wildfire Season never ends in this paradise we call home. Are you ready for the next wildfire to impact our area?

Many of us live and work in areas near or adjacent to brush and forested areas. Firefighters call those areas Wildland Urban-Interface (WUI) Zones. There are two types of WUI: intermix and interface. Intermix WUI are areas where housing and vegetation intermingle; interface WUI are areas describes housing in the vicinity of contiguous wildland vegetation. Which type do you live in or near? In most cases, the preparation needed for homeowners is the same. The following are helpful tips for you to use to become better prepared.

BEFORE THE FIRE-----------------------------------

PREPARE YOUR SPACE

ASSESS THE RISK – Look at your home from a Fire Professionals perspective. How is your home built? Do you have a combustible roof or exterior (wood siding)? Is there a way for embers from a fire to get under your roofing shingles or through your attic vents, causing a roof fire? Do you have combustible plants or furniture near your home? Anything that can burn can help spread the fire from the wildland to your home. Noncombustible walls, such as cinder block can deflect heat away from your home. Wood fencing will not provide heat shielding as they can burn. Are your smoke alarms functioning? They should be tested every year. Do you have electrical lines on your property? Make sure all vegetation is clear of electrical lines so they can’t contact them during high winds. (Wild Fires can create their own erratic winds). Does your home have rain gutters? Make sure they are cleaned of debris that can catch fire.

DEFENSIBLE SPACE- To assist Fire Professionals in protecting your property against an approaching wildfire, property owners should create “Defensible Space”. That is defined as the space (distance) between the wildland (brush and trees) and combustibles, such as your home.” Don’t forget
that your home is fuel for the fire. This also includes ornamental or decorative vegetation. Ornamental vegetation in close proximity to your home can be just as dangerous as if the wildland was close to your home regarding the spread of fire. Cal Fire requires 100 feet of brush clearance in WUI zones. Other California jurisdictions, such as Los Angeles, require more, up to 200 feet of clearance. The point is, more defensible space is better. The flame length of a raging wildfire can easily be 100 – 200 feet long so the less combustible material you have between the wildland and your home, the easier it is to protect.

**PREPARE YOURSELF**

**HAVE A PLAN** – Develop a family plan and practice it. Know where all family members will meet if required to be separated. Have an out of the area contact that other family members and friends can contact to know your status. Know what the plan is at your schools and workplace so your family can reunite. Have a plan to avoid driving if possible. Know your escape routes. Have multiple ways of exiting your area In case an evacuation is ordered or required.

**DOCUMENT YOUR VALUABLES** – Important documents and insurance papers should be kept in a fire proof container or safe. Copies should be in your Go Kit. It is advisable to photograph your documents and store in the cloud or on a portable devise.

**MAKE A KIT:** Have an Emergency Supply kit. Actually, you should have three; one for your home, vehicle, and workplace. Make sure your home kit has the following items as a minimum:

- **Water** – one gallon for each person in the household for 7 days.
- **Food** – 7 day supply for each member of your household. Food should be non-perishable and should include food for pets and special needs, i.e. infants, special dietary needs.
- **Medicine** – 7 day supply for prescription medication. Medicines should be keep in a “Go Bag” in the case that an evacuation is required.
- **First Aid** – Items to treat minor injuries and stop any bleeding. It’s a good idea to include a tourniquet and know how to use it for life-threatening bleeding.
- **Flashlight** – Also extra batteries that are changed each year. Have candles and matches ready if needed as a last resort. Be fire conscious.
- **Electronics** – Radio. Preferable one that is hand cranked or battery operated. Cell phone charger. Again, one that does not require electricity.
- **Sanitation items** – Hand sanitizer, towelettes, paper products, plastic bags (sealable and for trash), diapers if needed.
- **Clothing and blankets** – Have the ability to dress in layers and stay warm if the power goes out. (Wood for a fireplace can also be beneficial). Also, have spare shoes.
Sleeping bag – This should also be part of your Go Kit.

Assistive technology – If needed for medical equipment. Should include battery back-up power and items such as oxygen.

Manual can opener.

Extra cash. Cash is King during an emergency.

CAMPING SUPPLIES – Available camping supplies can be valuable if your home is without power and isolated for longer periods of time. Camp stoves, Lanterns, camp heaters, extra butane canisters, can be extremely useful. Although butane is safe to use indoors, make sure there is a battery operated carbon monoxide detector and adequate ventilation from a partially opened window, etc. (in case of equipment malfunction).

STAY INFORMED – Listen for Alerts and Warnings from officials. Opt in to “AlertMonterey” to receive alert messaging. When an evacuation order is issued, Leave Immediately. Have your evacuation kit in your vehicle so there is no delay in leaving the area. Register here: https://member.everbridge.net/index/453003085611217#/login

DURING THE FIRE

STAY INFORMED – Listen for Alerts and Warnings from officials. Opt-in to “AlertMontereyCounty” to receive lifesaving emergency alerts and notifications.

EVACUATE QUICKLY BUT CAREFULLY – When an evacuation order is issued, leave immediately. Have your evacuation kit in your vehicle so there is no delay in leaving the area. (This is repeated because it’s so important). Being involved in a traffic accident while trying to evacuate can put you and your family in grave danger.

PREPARE YOUR HOME – Leave your lights on in your home when you leave. Lock your doors. (This will deter looters. Firefighters can always get in if they need to).

FOLLOW EVACUATION INSTRUCTIONS – Don’t deviate from evacuation instructions even if the route does not seem like the most direct way out of the area. (Fire may impact other routes or they have been designated for emergency vehicles). Report to emergency shelters. Even if you have another safe place to go, checking in with allow response professionals to account for you.
AFTER THE FIRE

STAY INFORMED – Listen for information for local officials. Important instructions may be broadcast over traditional media. Contact your Insurance Company if you have sustained a loss. Contact your local Emergency Manager, there may be government benefits available that need to be applied for and other services such as a Family/Community Assistance Center or Family Relocation Center. Do not attempt to reenter an emergency area until officials allow you to do so. Many hazards may still exist even though the fire has past.

CHECK ON YOUR NEIGHBORS – A much needed sense of community can exist after an emergency. Your neighbors may need your support and you may need theirs without realizing it.

TALK ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE – Studies have shown that going through a disaster can sometimes create symptoms similar to Traumatic Stress Disorder. It always helps to discuss your experience and feelings. Since professional help if needed. It is not a sign of weakness to need help.