

# *Catholic Mutual. . . "CARES"*

## **Wildland Urban Interface Fire Safety**

Because of the potential of large and devastating losses due to wildland fires and the church's need to minister to our parishioners, care should be taken when building or maintaining church facilities in areas prone to wildland fires.

Due to diminishing firefighting resources and the inherently longer response times for emergency services to arrive at fires or other emergencies in our rural areas, it is vital to take steps to prevent fires and mitigate the extent of damage should a wildland fire occur. Much of this can be done very inexpensively by following nationally recognized wildland fire prevention and mitigation standards.

The first thing to do is address landscaping issues around our buildings and property. To best accomplish this in an orderly fashion, areas should be split into zones.

### **Zone 1**

This is the area within a 50 feet radius of each building. This is also referred to as the "Defensible Zone". Please consider most of these recommendations as normal housekeeping and preventative maintenance procedures to follow.

1. Keep all roofs, eaves, and gutters clear of any debris.
2. Remove all dead vegetation from around your buildings and grounds. This includes any accumulation on and around decks, porches, and sheltered areas. Dead vegetation and debris are highly flammable and will allow fire to spread quickly. This is something that should be done anywhere.
3. If you have firewood, move the stacks of wood a minimum of 50 feet away from all buildings into Zone 2. This includes garages, sheds and other outbuildings.
4. The ground immediately around all buildings should have a 2 foot border surrounding each building of non-combustible materials, such as river rock or similar materials.
5. If you choose to have a grass lawn around your buildings, ensure it is well irrigated and is kept mowed to a height of no more than 4 inches.
6. Any plants or shrubs you use to landscape the property should be fire resistant. For a list of acceptable plants, contact your local fire department or nursery. If you must have combustible plantings on your property, space the plants at least 15 feet away from all buildings and attached structures.

7. Thin out the number of trees within Zone 1. Older trees are fine to keep as long as they are older, more established trees with trunks at least 12 inches in diameter. Vital to preventing the spread of fire is the proper placement of trees that remain in Zone 1. The crown of all trees must be no closer than 30 feet to each other. This will prevent a fire from spreading rapidly from one tree to the next. This rule of thumb for placing trees on your property is based on flat, level ground. If you have sloped areas within Zone 1, the distance between trees needs to be increased. If the slope of the ground is over 20% and up to 40%, double the distance between trees. More than a 40% slope requires the distance between trees to triple.
8. Trees should be no closer than 10 feet to a building and there especially should not be any trees or branches under the eaves of any building.
9. Keep "ladder fuels" from growing around mature trees. Ladder fuels are considered small trees, brush, or other plants that grow unchecked under established trees. Fire uses these types of plants as a "ladder" to climb the mature trees, which will add fuel to the fire and allow it to spread rapidly. Nothing should be allowed to grow under mature trees within Zone 1.
10. Tree trimming is very important to prevent the spread of fire. Mature trees should be trimmed to not allow branches lower than 10 feet above the ground, yet maintaining 70% of the crown of the tree.

## **Zone 2**

This area is considered the space from 50 feet to 100 feet from all structures. All relevant items listed in Zone 1 apply to Zone 2.

1. Ground cover and landscaping items listed in Zone 1 applies. Remove all dead debris and keep plants and shrubs trimmed.
2. Remove all ladder fuels from Zone 2.
3. Any grasses in this area should also be regularly cut to a level not to exceed 8 inches.
4. Trees may be closer together in Zone 2. For example, instead of trees being 30 feet apart, they may be spaced as close as 20 feet apart. Any trees located on sloped grounds require increased spacing based on the same guidelines noted in Zone 1.
5. Any propane tanks and firewood should not be located under the crowns of trees. They should be located no closer than 15 feet from the crown of any surrounding trees.

## **Zone 3**

This zone is the area 100 to 200 feet from all structures on the property. This is also an area that may impact your neighboring property. It is important to work together with your neighbors in preventing fires from spreading.

1. Tree spacing and trimming recommendations remain the same in Zone 3. Limbs should be trimmed to no lower than 10 feet about the ground and ladder fuels removed.
2. Any natural grasses should be moved to a height of no more than 8 inches high within 10 feet of a public right-of-way.
3. Dead vegetation and debris should be removed.

The above listed items are considered minimums and for more detailed information please contact your local fire department or fire marshal's office. You can also check the links below for more information:

[http://bofdata.fire.ca.gov/PDF/Copyof4291finalguidelines9\\_29\\_06.pdf](http://bofdata.fire.ca.gov/PDF/Copyof4291finalguidelines9_29_06.pdf)

<http://www.readyforwildfire.org>

<http://calfire.ca.gov>

<http://www.firewise.org>