

## Fire Prevention Season is Upon Us

Well, it's *always* fire prevention season here in Eldorado. But we have to be especially vigilant, prudent, and firewise during the months of June and July.

Mike Fuelner, the Santa Fe County Fire Department Wildland Captain, has kindly shared resources. Download a pdf of the detailed *Ready Set Go: Your Personal Wildfire Action Plan* pamphlet on fire prevention and preparedness from the ECIA web page at [www.eldoradosf.org](http://www.eldoradosf.org).

The *Ready Set Go* pamphlet provides checklists for both fire prevention, and for preparedness for evacuation due to fire or other reasons. Make sure you know where your cat carriers and dog leashes are, and that anyone house sitting for you knows where to find these. Check your smoke alarms periodically, and have portable fire extinguishers near to hand in the kitchen.

A fire safe is a good idea. Suitcase-style portable ones with important papers, hard drives, etc. can be grabbed if you have to evacuate, and should help protect valuables in a worst case scenario if you are not home. If you are dependent on medication, make sure you could grab your most crucial ones if you had to evacuate quickly.

An informative video explaining simple protection practices, "Your Home Can Survive a Wildfire," can be viewed here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vL\\_syp1ZScM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vL_syp1ZScM). One of the takeaways from the video is the importance of protecting your home against flying embers known as firebrands. All debris should be removed from your roof, and vents should be screened with 1/8 inch or less metal screening.

**Nort Phillips of the Eldorado Volunteer Fire and Rescue** is willing to do on-site assessments following current Covid-19 safety protocols. Meetings will be outdoors only, with all participants wearing masks and maintaining physical distancing. One or two members of a household should be present. Nort will ask questions and offer advice for safety inside the home. One suggestion most of us probably haven't thought of is cutting out a piece of cardboard to cover the opening to your fireplace in case you had to evacuate, to prevent fire being sucked inside your home. To schedule a home assessment with Nort, call [541] 991-0693 or the fire department non-emergency number, [505] 466-1204.

As of May 2<sup>nd</sup>, Santa Fe County has a ban on burn permits and on open burns. You can still grill, but keep your barbecue or grill 3 feet away from walls. People should not throw cigarette butts out of cars.

Each household can be proactive by clearing a 30 to 50- foot defensible space in the wild land immediately around homes and any structures. This does not have to be right to the ground. Pull out invasive plants—preferably before they seed—such as cheat grass, Russian thistle (which dries out to become the familiar tumbleweed), and goat's head, and then weed whack or hand cut to 6 inches above ground level to avoid as much erosion and

damage to the land and biodiversity as possible. In addition, remove dead leaves or other dry debris from gardens and wild land close to your home.

Some people like to xeriscape immediately around their homes, which is also a good solution. This can range from planting flowering drought-tolerant perennials to gardens of cactus and hardscaping. It is important to clear debris from under your juniper trees so it does not act as ladder fuel. Some people choose to trim lower branches on junipers near structures, but be aware that the tradeoff of this alteration of natural ground cover can create greater erosion, drying of the soil, loss of biodiversity, and diminished ability of the soil to hold water.

As we start to get rains, a good time to pull out weeds you are sure are invasive is right after a rain when the ground is moist and soft. You'll find that invasive species thrive on disturbed land and over septic leach fields, so that's a good place to start so that you don't end up with a dangerous thicket of dry prickly weeds. You can also start restoring your land by putting our native grass seeds such as blue gramma and buffalo grass, available at some local nurseries, once the monsoon pattern sets in. The grasses may require extra watering unless we get a strong monsoon.

If we all work together by taking individual responsibility for our own land and supporting community efforts and education, we can remain safe and instead of "fire season," consider it "fire prevention season." Meanwhile, let's hope for and visualize an early, long, and abundant monsoon season with more rainbows than lightning.

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