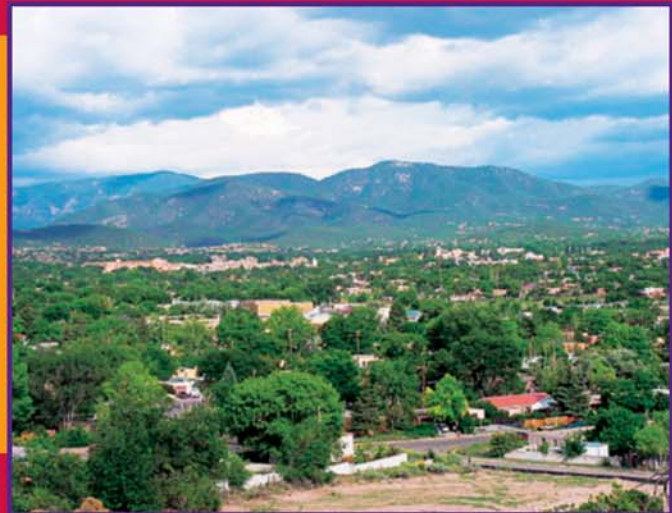


SURVIVING A WILDFIRE IN SANTA FE

Are you prepared?



Ignacio Peralta, USFS



Some useful websites:

www.santafetrees.com

www.santafenm.gov

www.sfcfire.org

www.firewise.org

The homes and vegetation in fire prone areas in Santa Fe are very diverse.

As part of your wildfire preparation, we suggest you contact your local fire department.

Call the City at 955-3110 or the County at 992-3070 for specific recommendations for you and your home.

UNDERSTANDING WILDFIRE

An ember to remember

Most fires start small – a match, a cigarette, a spark. And most fires stay small. They just burn a little patch of grass, and then fizzle out. However, there is one thing that can change a fizzle into an inferno: *WIND*. Are you prepared for what can happen when a fizzle meets a breeze? Picture this.



- That little tiny fire burns a little patch of grass. But a breeze comes along and pushes the fire for a couple of feet to the edge of a bone-dry chamisa bush.
- The chamisa quickly bursts into flame. The tall flames above the chamisa are bent by the wind and ignite a nearby piñon pine.

*All fires start small. All fires go out.
What matters is what happens in between.*

- Now spreading in drought-stressed trees, the fire grows to the size of a football field in less than ten minutes. The bigger it gets, the faster it grows.
- The flames are now taller than your house. Pushed by the wind, the flaming front of the fire is moving faster than you can walk.
- The wind throws embers 1/4 mile ahead of the flames. These embers start new fires.
- As the main fire approaches your house, strong winds blow embers everywhere possible – under decks, against wood coyote fences, into wood piles, and through open doors and windows. Embers blown onto the roof come to rest in thick piles of dry pine needles.
- In some places the air is so smoky that you can't see more than 10 feet.
- Close to where the fire is burning most intensely, the air is far too hot to breathe.
- The rising smoke and ash create winds on the ground that cause all the fires to burn even more intensely.



Dense vegetation like this allows a small grass fire to quickly climb into the trees.



Lawrence Garcia, USFS

A huge plume of smoke can rise thousands of feet above the main fire



Craig Allen, USGS

Thirty miles from the Santa Fe Plaza, the Cerro Grande Fire burned for several weeks, pushed by strong winds.

Fires like this occur every year in every state from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean.

The biggest fire near Santa Fe was the Cerro Grande fire, which destroyed part of Los Alamos in 2000. Other big fires in the region include the Encebado fire near Taos and the Montañño fire in Albuquerque's bosque, both in 2003.

When it is hot, dry and windy we need to be watchful and be prepared to take action to protect our families and property.

This booklet is full of suggestions to help you plan ahead and make the right decisions when smoke fills the air.

PREVENTING WILDFIRES

Many big fires are caused by small mistakes, so please be careful, especially on windy days. Before starting a fire outdoors, find out what rules and fire restrictions you need to follow.



Soak fireplace ashes.



Stay with your barbeque grill while cooking.



Put cigarettes out cold.



Make sure you have a screen on your chimney.



Park your car away from tall grass.



Watch out when welding.



Be careful when burning weeds and debris.



Drown and stir your campfire until it is cold to the touch.

PREPARING YOUR HOME

Here are some simple things that you can do to reduce the possibility that your house will be damaged by a wildfire.



Move firewood away from structures.



Move outdoor furniture made of wood or cloth away from structures.



Use a metal trellis instead of wood.

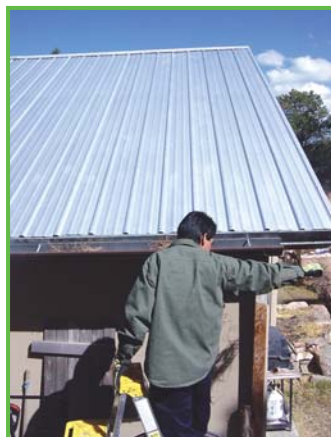
Remove sections of wood fencing that touch the house.



Keep dried grass and weeds cut short around the house.



Rake pine needles and tree bark away from structures.



Clean needles off the roof.



Thin the dense trees and shrubs near your house.

Other things you can do:

- Screen outside vents and openings, including the space beneath decks.
- Remove lumber, needles, and leaves from under decks and outdoor staircases.

FIRST CHOICE - EVACUATING SAFELY



The safest place for your family is somewhere that is not threatened by a fire.

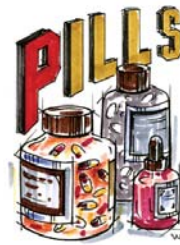
By planning ahead you can evacuate more quickly and be sure that you will remember the most important things.

The important stuff

Make a list of items to take with you and know where they are located. Consider gathering some of these items now and keeping them in a box that is ready to go.

Remember the "Five P's"

1. PILLS, eyeglasses and other medical supplies
2. PAPERS, like birth certificates and tax records
3. PICTURES, small artwork, jewelry and other important mementos
4. PETS, pet food, leashes and pet carriers
5. PHONE, charger and phone numbers of people you will want to call



On the road

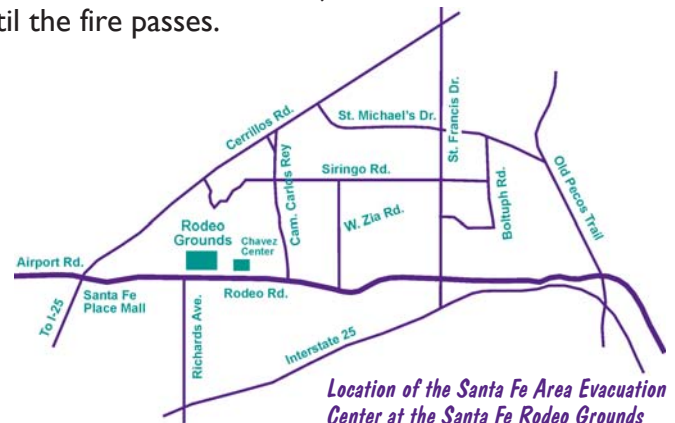
The evacuation route you use should be away from the fire and away from the direction that the fire is moving. Identify several different routes so that you can choose the safest one. Try to avoid narrow roads that could easily become blocked.

- Take a vehicle that has enough gas for lots of slow driving and waiting.
- Leave gates open for easy access by firefighters.
- Drive slowly with your headlights on and doors unlocked. If it is smoky, close the windows and turn off any ventilation fan.
- Follow instructions from police and fire personnel.
- Do not return home until emergency personnel have determined that it is safe.
- If you are trapped by fire while you are in your car, park in an area that is clear of vegetation (a surface that is paved, gravel or dirt), close all windows and vents, cover yourself with a blanket or jacket and lie on the floor. Be aware that the car tires may burst. Stay in your car until the fire passes.

Where you can go

If you evacuate, please check in at the Santa Fe Rodeo Grounds, which has been designated as the Santa Fe Area Evacuation Center. You can bring house pets and large animals with you for temporary boarding and learn about shelter availability for you and your family. Checking in at the Rodeo Grounds will also enable family and friends to know you are safe.

For more information about preparing for an emergency, go to www.ready.gov, or www.redcross.org.



LAST RESORT – TAKING SHELTER IN A HOME

Evacuating may not be the safest thing to do. It might be safer for you to stay in your home, (or go to a neighbor's home) if any of these conditions exist:

- Your only escape route goes into the fire.
- Your only escape route is congested or blocked with vehicles.
- Smoke is so thick you can't see where you are going and you don't know where the fire is.
- The fire is so close or is moving so fast you do not have time to evacuate safely.
- Emergency personnel (in person or by phone) recommend that you stay.



*Is **YOUR** house a safe place to take shelter?*

If any of these describe your house you should NOT stay during a wildfire.

- The house has wood siding or wood shingles.
- The house is located in a narrow canyon or is on a steep slope with continuous thick vegetation below.
- There are dense shrubs near windows or sliding doors.
- There are lots of combustible materials next to the house, such as brush piles, wood piles or wood sheds.

*If your house is **NOT** a safe place to take shelter, then make arrangements **NOW** to stay with a neighbor whose house is much safer.*

If you take shelter in a home...

- Close all windows and doors to prevent sparks from blowing inside.
- Move fabric-covered furniture away from large windows or sliding doors.
- Close all interior doors to slow the spread of smoke or fire in the house.
- Turn off equipment that circulates air in the house.
- Gather your family, pets, a cell phone, a fire extinguisher, a battery-powered radio and some bottled water. Take a flashlight in case the power goes off.
- Go to an interior room or hallway that is farthest from the approaching fire. Stay away from perimeter walls.
- Listen for fire information and instructions on a radio or television.
- Use your cell phone for necessary calls and leave your landline available for emergency officials or neighbors to call you.
- Keep your family together and remain as calm as possible. Remember, if it gets hot inside the house, it is much hotter outside.



After the fire front passes and the thick smoke clears...

- Protect your lungs and airway by covering your nose and mouth with a dry cloth.
- Protect your skin by wearing cotton or wool long pants, a long sleeve shirt or jacket and gloves. Do not wear nylon or other synthetic fabrics.
- Avoid opening interior doors that feel hot.
- Use a garden hose or buckets of water to put out fires.
- Check each room and the exterior and roof of your house. Extinguish all sparks and embers.
- Look for concealed embers below decks and against fences.
- Watch out for downed power lines and weakened trees or branches that could fall down.
- See if your neighbors need help.
- Listen to the radio for instructions on what to do.