



NFPA Firewise USA Action Plan

For The Hillside, Austin, Texas



2024
Version 2.0



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Contact Information for Firewise Resident Leader(s):

Name: Doug Kissner

Email: dkissner@aol.com

Phone #: 512-217-4888

1.0 INTRODUCTION TO FIREWISE USA®



National Fire Protection Association's Firewise USA®

The National Fire Protection Association's (NFPA) [Firewise USA®](#) organization is a voluntary program that provides a framework to help neighbors get organized, find direction, and take action to increase the ignition resistance of their homes and community. The Firewise USA® national recognition program empowers residents to work collaboratively in reducing wildfire risks.

The Firewise USA® Recognition Program was designed as a tool for forestry and fire service professionals to use to work with residents to obtain voluntary compliance with existing wildfire safety rules, as well as to motivate community action toward wildfire safety in the absence of strict ordinances or laws. The Recognition Program encourages and acknowledges citizen involvement in reducing community wildfire risk.

The Firewise USA® goal is to promote community-wide participation in the use of technology, policy and practices that minimize the loss of life and property to wildfire, independent of firefighting efforts. The Firewise USA® program is seamlessly contained in this goal. With little or no preparation before a wildfire event, a community can suffer much loss. However, with regular attention to community wildfire mitigation through an Action Plan, wildfire can occur with little to no lasting effect on homeowners. This fact has been illustrated repeatedly around the United States.

Firewise USA® provides up to date, take-action information to homeowners and communities. Residents who participate in the Firewise USA® process will get a Community Risk Assessment from AFD's Wildfire Division. The community will also create an Action Plan that commits them to a sustained program of wildfire mitigation that is generally both physically attainable and cost-effective. The homeowners learn about home ignitability so they can create their own, unique solutions to their wildfire mitigation challenges. When people understand there is something they can do, they are more apt to act. They search out more information to validate what they have already learned. One of the most important things Firewise USA® participants learn is that neighbors can help neighbors—and that they are often inextricably linked together in their mitigation solutions.

Texas has just about 100 Firewise USA® sites. As of 2024, the City of Austin is home to 24 Firewise communities. The Austin Fire Department is here to help; if you are interested in learning more about how your neighborhood can take action to help prepare other neighborhoods against the threat of wildfire, please reach out!

Once a community receives the Firewise USA® designation, it will have to complete annual renewal applications on the [Firewise Portal](#) to maintain “in good standing” status. This annual renewal application will ask for information about wildfire risk reduction efforts in your community such as:

- **Educational outreach:** Host an outreach event and work with neighbors on addressing items in the action plan.
- **Risk reduction investment:** Record your community’s efforts to reduce wildfire risk within the past year. You can include any volunteer time and expenses invested towards reaching your goals.
 - At a minimum, each site is required to annually invest the equivalent of one volunteer hour per dwelling unit in wildfire risk reduction actions. If your site has identified 100 homes within its boundary, then 100 hours of work or the monetary equivalent which will be \$31.80 (2024) per dwelling unit. Please note that the value of a volunteer hour tends to increase annually.
 - A worksheet to record volunteer hours & investments towards wildfire mitigation can be found [on the Firewise Volunteer Hourly Worksheet](#). Examples of activities and financial expenditures that count toward your annual investment can be found on the [Firewise Time & Expense Investment Examples sheet](#).

2.0 ACTION PLAN

The action plan is a prioritized list of risk-reduction projects/investments for the participating site, along with suggested homeowner actions and education activities that participants will strive to complete annually, or over a period of multiple years. **Action plans should be updated, at a minimum, every three years.**

2.1 Plan Implementation

Wildfire mitigation is the implementation of various precautionary measures that work to minimize the destructive effects of wildfire. Some measures focus on clearing vegetation to reduce the amount of fuels available, while other strategies concentrate on treating structures to improve their ability to withstand a wildfire. These efforts support the goals of the [National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy](#), which emphasizes an “all-hands, all-lands” approach to managing wildland fire through community engagement and partnerships. Learn more at

2.2 Prioritized Fuel Reduction

When guided by conservation-based principles, fuel-hazard reduction can facilitate long-term positive environmental outcomes and assist in the process of restoring health to the woodlands, scrublands, grasslands, and watersheds while providing for community wildfire resilience. Fuels reduction can be achieved through a variety of methods including mechanical treatment, chemical treatment, prescribed fire, and grazing.

2.3 Structure Ignition Zone Evaluations (SIZE)

Any home located within the Wildland Urban Interface and surrounding area may be at risk in the event of a wildfire. Home design, construction materials, and immediate surroundings all contribute to the ease with which a home will ignite during a wildfire. Treatment of structural ignitability by homeowners in collaboration with fire professionals can help to reduce this risk. Additionally, maintaining “defensible space,” the area immediately surrounding a structure, is critical to a structure’s survival during a wildfire.

There are methods homeowners can use to prepare their homes to withstand ember attacks and minimize the likelihood of flames or surface fire touching the structure or any attachments. Experiments, models, and post-fire studies have shown ignitions happen due to the condition of the home and everything around it, up to 200 feet from the foundation, known as the Structure Ignition Zone (SIZ).

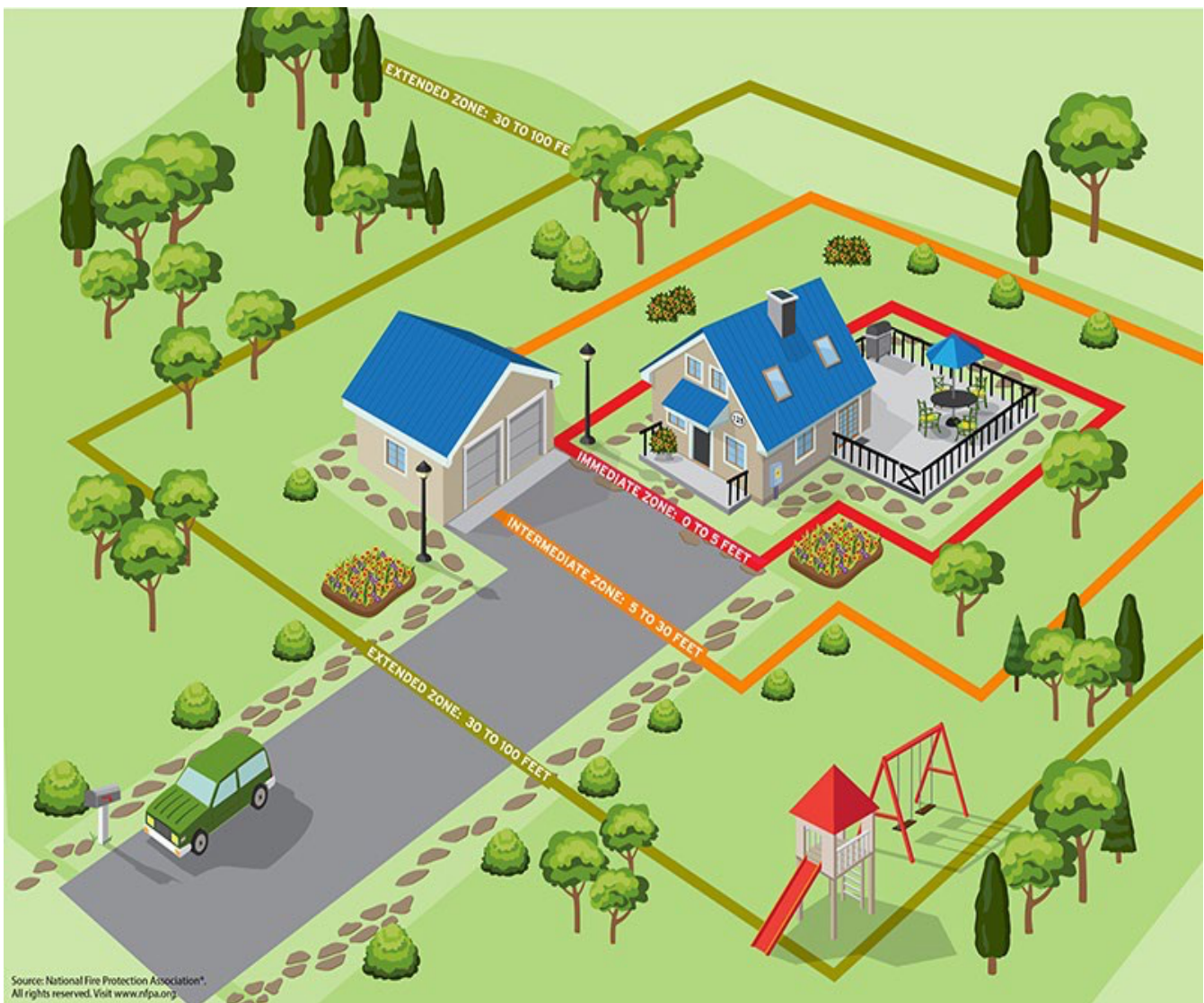
AFD’s Wildfire Division has skilled evaluators who can conduct free individual home evaluations. Evaluations are available by appointment; sign up for a Structure Ignition Zone Evaluation (SIZE) online at www.atxwildfirehub.com or call Austin 311.



Personnel from the AFD Wildfire Division along with Austin-Area Firewise Alliance members can train individuals in your community to perform these SIZ Evaluations both for your neighborhood and surrounding communities.

What exactly is the Structure Ignition Zone?

The concept of the SIZ was developed by [retired USDA Forest Service fire scientist Jack Cohen](#) in the late 1990s, following breakthrough experimental research into how homes ignite due to the effects of radiant heat and ember dispersal. The SIZ is divided into three zones: immediate, intermediate, and extended. An evaluation of each zone can be performed to educate the homeowner on the best methods to minimize wildfire risk. Included within the immediate zone is the structure itself, and there are precautions that homeowners and planners can take to reduce structure vulnerability by undertaking a process known as “home hardening.” This phrase describes the use of non-combustible building materials and the maintenance of a debris-free area around the structure.

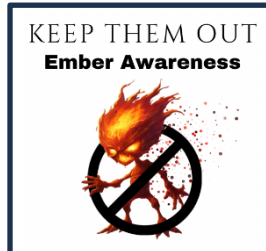


Zone 1: Immediate Zone

The home and the area 0-5' from the furthest attached exterior point of the home; defined as a non-combustible area. Fire science tells us this is the most important zone as it is the most vulnerable to embers.

- Clean roofs and gutters of dead leaves, debris and pine needles that could catch embers.
- Replace or repair any loose or missing shingles or roof tiles to prevent ember penetration.
- Reduce embers that could pass through vents in the eaves by installing 1/8" metal mesh screening.
- Clean debris from exterior attic vents and install 1/8" metal mesh screening in gable and soffit vents to reduce embers.
- Repair or replace damaged or loose window screens and any broken windows. Double-paned windows are preferable as they provide an added layer of protection from flame impingement.
- Remove any combustible material stored underneath decks or porches. Screen or box-in areas below patios and decks with wire mesh to prevent debris and combustible materials from accumulating.
- Move any flammable material away from wall exteriors-mulch, ignition-prone plants, leaves and needles, firewood, etc.

START YOUR SIZE WITH THE HOUSE ITSELF, then move into the landscaping section of the Immediate Zone.



Research around structure loss in wildfires points to embers and small flames as the main way that most homes ignite in wildfires. Embers (aka firebrands) are burning pieces of material that can be carried more than a mile through the wind and can cause spot fires and ignite homes and other combustible objects.

Zone 2: Intermediate zone

5-30' from the furthest exterior point of the home. Landscaping/hardscaping- employing Firewise landscaping and creating breaks that can slow a fire's progression and decrease fire intensity.

- Clear vegetation from under large stationary propane tanks.
- Create fuel breaks with driveways, walkways/paths, patios, and decks.
- Keep lawns and native grasses mowed to a height of four inches.
- Remove ladder fuels (vegetation under trees) so a surface fire cannot reach the crowns. Prune trees six to ten feet from the ground; for shorter trees do not exceed 1/3 of the overall tree height.
- Space trees to have a minimum of eighteen feet between crowns with the distance increasing with the percentage of slope.

- Remove vegetation adjacent to storage sheds or other outbuildings within this area.
- Tree placement should be planned to ensure the mature canopy is no closer than ten feet to the edge of the structure.
- Tree and shrubs in this zone should be limited to small clusters of a few each to break up the continuity of the vegetation across the landscape.

Zone 3: Extended zone

30-100' property line. Landscaping – the goal here is not to eliminate fire but to interrupt fire's path and keep flames smaller and on the ground.

- Dispose of heavy accumulations of ground litter/debris.
- Remove dead plant and tree material.
- Remove small conifers growing between mature trees.
- Remove vegetation adjacent to storage sheds or other outbuildings within this area.

2.4 Education Plans

As a recognized Firewise community, education and outreach efforts should be ongoing. Plans to educate the residents should be implemented by the community leaders within **Hillside**.

Examples of Educational Outreach include:

Check boxes with options you would like to utilize for educational outreach

- ☒ Participate in the annual NFPA Wildfire Community Preparedness Day on the first Saturday in May.
- ☒ Distribute wildfire safety information provided by NFPA and AFD Wildfire Division.
- ☒ Send free Firewise USA® and emergency preparedness tips through the community's social media or text messaging platforms.
- ☒ Create a "join" **WarnCentralTexas.org** campaign to raise awareness of the program in the community.
- ☒ Launch a "Chipper Day" for the community to facilitate fuels reduction.
- ☒ Consider holding an Education Day at someone's home or at a community gathering space (e.g., library or an HOA meeting room).
 - Have someone from AFD's Wildfire Division or the Austin Area Firewise Alliance provide information on Firewise USA® principles; Ready, Set, Go: what it takes to be a Firewise USA® site, etc.
- ☒ Leverage the videos and presentation materials available from Firewise USA® to raise interest and encourage discussion during the session. You will need two to three hours to cover the essentials.
- ☒ Provide each household with basic information. At a minimum: "Ready, Set, Go" brochure; "Embers Aware" brochure; "Firewise Landscaping" brochure.
- ☒ Describe the free Structure Ignition Zone Evaluation (SIZE) available from AFD and neighborhood volunteers (contact Austin 3-1-1, the AFD Wildfire Division, or the Austin Area Firewise Alliance) to assess home strengths and risk areas.
- ☒ Inform your community about the work to be done (CRA, Action Plan) as you become a Firewise USA® site.

- ☒ Describe your annual event that focuses on wildfire prevention: Perhaps a fuels mitigation effort or an awareness activity (e.g., part of your community's annual Neighborhood Night Out in October or in concert with National Wildfire Preparedness Day on the first Saturday in May).

3.0 Action Plan Guide:

Enter your mitigation plans (fuels reduction, education, volunteer days, etc.) for at least the next 3 years here

Priority Addressed	Task/Action	Responsible Party	Time table	Funding Needs/ Source	Level of Priority
	Centralized online documentation and send regular fire safety updates and tips.	Firewise Committee	Bi-annually	3 Volunteer Days	High
	Clear flammable materials annually within 5 feet of structures.	Firewise Committee and landscapers	Annual	HOA Budget	High
	Manage vegetation within 30 feet every 2-3 years.	Firewise Committee and landscapers	Every 2-3 years	HOA Budget	Mid
	Manage land up to 200 feet from homes every 3-5 years.	Firewise Committee and landscapers	Every 3-5 years	HOA Budget	Low
	Maintain firebreaks around the perimeter of the community.	Firewise Committee and landscapers	Every 3-5 years	HOA Budget	Low
	Replace decks and walkways with fire-resistant materials	HOA Board and contractors	10 decks within next 3 years	HOA Budget	Low

3.1 Storage & Renewal

This Action Plan is a living document and will be stored on your community's account on the [Firewise Portal](#). The AFD Wildfire Division will also keep record of your required Firewise documentation. **The Action Plan will be reviewed and updated every 3 years** by the **Hillside** Firewise Resident Leader and other key stakeholders. During these review periods, the risks identified in the Action Plan will be reassessed and new prioritized actions will be identified.

In addition to the Action Plan, **your Community Risk Assessment needs to be updated every five years. Wildfire Mitigation Specialists working with the AFD Wildfire Division will be tasked with updating this document, and maintaining regular contact with your assigned Specialist will ensure documentation remains accurate and up to date.**

4.0 Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)

The Community Risk Assessment (CRA) and Action Plan are important steps in the Firewise USA® recognition process. When combined, the CRA and Action Plan can constitute a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). A CWPP well exceeds the information needed by NFPA to participate in the Firewise USA® program. Initial introduction, community outreach and buy in, and regular implementation of Firewise USA® principles in the community are crucial in maintaining a robust CWPP. Community leaders should engage with residents to seek voluntary participation.

The effectiveness of this CWPP is contingent upon the proper implementation of the recommendations presented in Section 3. Proper implementation will require the delegation of tasks to specific people and/or agencies who will collaborate to develop action plans for each identified project.

5.0 Resources

The following links will help to provide more information on guidelines, regulations and maps to help identify what applies in your project area. These sites provide contacts for additional information.

- City of Austin Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Code: Information on Austin's WUI Code and its local amendments.

<https://www.austintexas.gov/departments/wildland-urban-interface-code>

- City of Austin Residential Brush Collection: Residential brush collection schedule and guidelines.

<https://www.austintexas.gov/brush>

- City of Austin Watershed Protection Department: Information on reducing the impact of flooding, erosion and water pollution.

<https://www.austintexas.gov/departments/watershed-protection>

- Texas Oak Wilt Partnership: Information on the prevention and awareness of Texas Oak Wilt.

<https://texasoakwilt.org/>

- Balcones Canyonland Preserve Information: Information on BCP management, as well as local endangered species preservation.

<https://www.traviscountytx.gov/tnr/nr/bcp>

<https://www.austintexas.gov/department/balcones-canyonlands>

To sign up for a **SIZE**, scan this QR code:



To learn more about

wildfire here in Austin,

scan this QR code:



**WILDFIRE
DIVISION**

