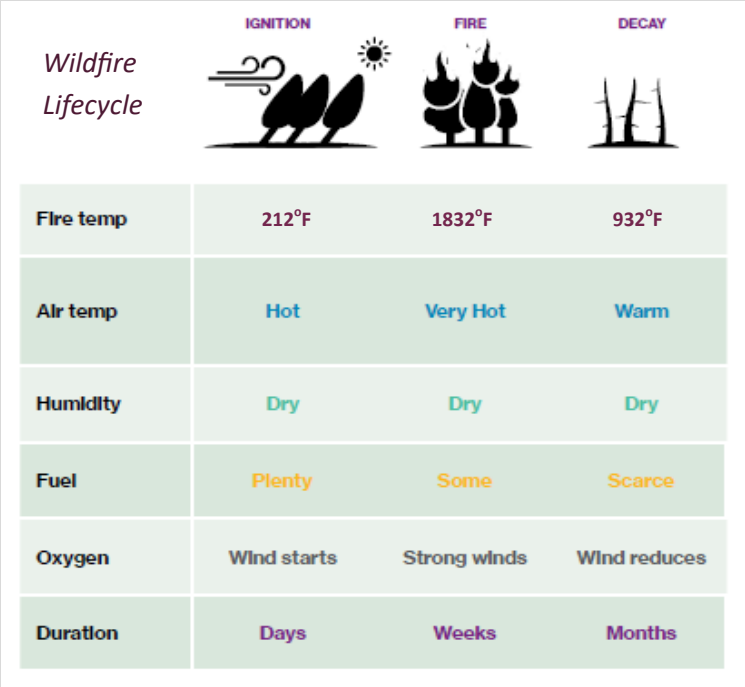


Wildfire Wisdom



Willis Towers Watson

Wildfires can occur anywhere if the conditions are right. Even the Arctic circle experienced wildfires in the summer of 2018. Nearly 85 percent* of wildfires in the U.S. are caused by people: unattended campfires, the burning of debris, discarded cigarettes, and intentional acts of arson.

A wildfire can spread up to 14mph on flat grasslands and even faster upslope. Contrary to what we may think, having a particularly wet winter can enhance the risk of a wildfire; if more plants grow, they will create more fuel to feed a wildfire once it is ignited. The highest wildfire risk is actually found at the boundary of the wild and urban areas (known as the Wild-Urban Interface ‘WUI’); this is where 1/3 of US homes are located. There are over 100,000 lightning strikes around the world each day, with 10-20% causing a fire.

Once a wildfire starts, it could take hours/days/weeks before it ends, causing millions of dollars of destruction along the way. If a wildfire preparation plan is not a part of your church’s emergency preparedness plan, we highly recommend you incorporate it.

Here are some tips to help your church prepare if there is a wildfire warning in your area:

- Keep gutters and roof free of debris such as sticks, leaves, pine needles and fallen tree branches.
- Check all valleys, dormers, vents, and chimneys where debris is likely to collect.
- Clean out under any porches/decking or open space where leaves and debris may accumulate.
- Move any woodpiles, movable furniture, grills, coverings, etc. from outside to inside.
- Install hard surfaces around buildings, such as a concrete walkway, or use noncombustible products, such as rock.
- Keep the lawn well irrigated. Shrubs and trees are not recommended close to buildings. Remove dead vegetation. Trim trees that overhang your roof.
- Propane tanks should be at least 100 feet away from building, if possible.

If a wildfire is heading in your direction but you have not yet been advised to evacuate, take some precautions to prepare for evacuation:

- Close the windows; if they are not multi-pane, tempered glass, cover them with shutters or ½ inch thick plywood.
- Close all interior doors to prevent draft.
- Shut off any natural gas, propane or fuel oil supplies at the source.
- Place tennis balls in downspouts and fill the gutters with water.
- Turn on outside lights to make the building more visible; leave a light on in each room to aid firefighters.

**Source: 2000-2017 data based on Wildland Fire Management Information (WFMI)*

Wildfire Wisdom

If advised to evacuate, do so immediately. Lock your building and choose a route away from the fire hazard. Watch for changes in the speed and direction of the fire and smoke. Your church's important documents should be in a secured box and taken with you:

- Banking records with account numbers including credit cards and cash
- Insurance policies and mortgage documents
- Rental agreements with church property users
- Contact information for church members

Once the wildfire has passed, churches may be anxious to return to the church to assess the buildings.

However, it is critical to allow authorities to assess the situation first; do not enter the church again until the authorities confirm your buildings are safe. Your local fire department will let you know if it is safe to turn on water, electricity, or natural gas. If you have not been given any direction with regard to utilities, please check with your fire department before turning them back on.

Once you are allowed to return to the church:

- Contact your insurance company to file a claim.
- If there is damage, create an inventory of damaged goods; consider videotaping and photographing to help with an insurance claim.
- Save receipts for all expenses related to repairs and clean-up.
- Throw away any food, beverages, or medicine that was exposed to heat, smoke, or water.

Wildfires are large fires which occur in rural areas and can be caused by lightning, campfires, overheating vegetation, arson and cigarettes.

Fact
#1

Wildfire Causes

Humans are the cause of four out of five wildfires with ignitions commonly caused by campfires, cigarettes and vehicle sparks.



Fact
#2

Wildfire Travel

Wildfires move faster when travelling uphill than downhill because heat rises.



Fact
#3

Secondary Perils

Wildfires can cause pollution, landslides, mudslides and flash floods.



Fact
#4

Influence on Weather

As heat from large wildfires rises, the air cools and condenses to form clouds which can produce rainfall.



Fact
#5

Firenadoes

Large fires can spawn "firenadoes" which can extend hundreds of feet tall (100x higher than a standard fire) and measure more than 25% hotter than a standard wildfire.



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