

RESIDENTS REDUCE WILDFIRE RISKS THROUGH THE FIREWISE USA™ PROGRAM

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The Firewise USA™ national recognition program evolved from a 1986 cooperative agreement between the Forest Service and the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). The agreement enabled NFPA, as a national nonprofit safety organization with an extensive history of successful fire and safety public education campaigns, to develop the recognition program and corresponding resources and methods for teaching residents living in areas prone to wildfire how to reduce their risks. The recognition program began in 2002 with a dozen pilot sites. Through our partnership with the Forest Service, the National Association of State Foresters, State forestry agencies, and local fire departments, the program is now active in 42 States, with a focus on communities in the



Figure 1—The three home ignition zones (0–5 feet [0–1.5 m], 5–30 feet [1.5–9 m], 30–100 feet [9–30 m]). Reducing risks within the three zones increases the chances of a home surviving a wildfire. Source: National Fire Protection Association.

wildland–urban interface, where homes and structures are in direct contact with wildlands and the inhabitants often have come from urban areas (NIFC, n.d.).

National Recognition Program

Under the Firewise USA™ national recognition program, residents living in the wildland–urban interface have been taking action to reduce the wildfire hazards around the exterior of their homes and in the three home ignition zones on their properties (fig. 1). Both kinds of measures have been part of the national Firewise USA™ recognition program since 2002. Such activities are the cornerstone of the program

at 1,479 participating sites, including 170 new sites in 2017 (fig. 2).

Mitigation achievements vary from site to site, with accomplishments frequently greatest when one or more resident leaders in the community provide motivation, coordination, oversight, and encouragement to their neighbors. The number of individuals who step up to play a leading role is astonishingly high; typically, each wears the “resident leader” hat with great pride. Leaders take on that role because they believe in risk reduction and truly want a safer place to live. They deserve immense kudos.

The Firewise USA™ national recognition program emphasizes the

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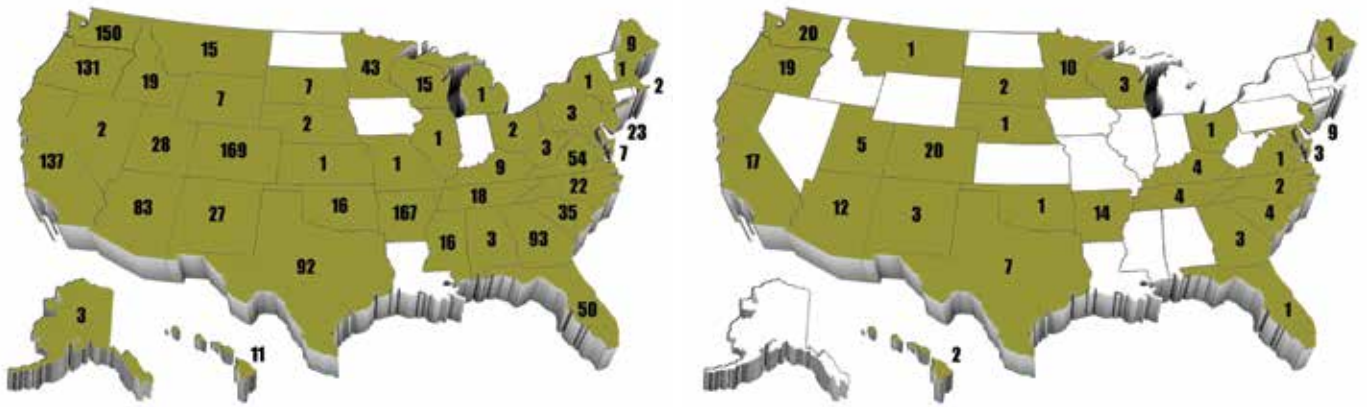


Figure 2—Active sites map (left) and new sites map (right). There are 1,479 active Firewise sites in areas with wildfire potential. In 2017, 170 sites in 24 States qualified as new nationally recognized Firewise sites. Source: National Fire Protection Association.

importance of neighbors working together to maximize the benefits of their mitigation work and to reach beyond their own individual property lines to assist elderly or disabled neighbors who are unable to reduce wildfire risks on their own. Each year, program participants must meet a set of renewal criteria to remain in the program and retain the status of “in good standing.” Projects designed to help elderly or disabled neighbors fit perfectly into the program’s framework and are often a part of the work completed to meet the required annual renewal criteria.

Firewise Portal

In July 2017, in cooperation with the Forest Service, the NFPA launched a tool to encourage and document efforts by Firewise participants to track and measure their mitigation, education, and outreach projects (fig. 3). The Firewise Portal is a comprehensive resource complete with an online application and renewal system. The portal allows for the collection of residential mitigation information on an unprecedented scale.

Within months of its launch, users were providing copious amounts of detail about the types and volume of work they were completing. The portal is an asset for resident leaders, regional coordinators, NFPA,

and State and Federal staff. The data collected will help everyone gain a better understanding of the mitigation that residents are accomplishing at the local level.

Through the portal’s easy-to-use software, reporting risk reduction activities is simple. Every Firewise site has an action plan that outlines the risk reduction priorities for the site. The Firewise Portal is an indepth repository for Firewise sites, letting them document and track their mitigation actions by both hours worked and dollars invested. The portal lets them easily monitor progress towards the goals and objectives outlined in their action plans; the information is archived within the portal. In addition, the portal stores a Firewise participant’s risk assessment, which can be updated as needed.

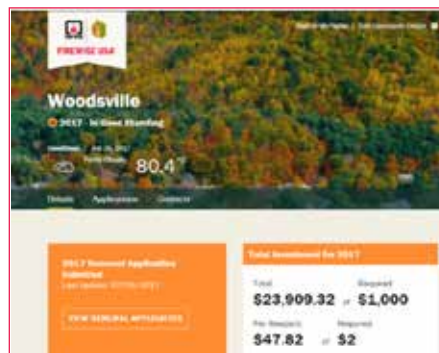


Figure 3—The Firewise Portal documents and tracks risk reduction accomplishments. Source: National Fire Protection Association.

The portal guides users through a user-friendly documentation system that tracks the number of hours residents worked by individual action categories and by location within the home ignition zones (see the sidebar on the next page). It also tracks the related dollars invested in projects (contractor costs, grants, rental equipment, and so forth).

Through the portal, users report a major component of wildfire risk reduction: vegetation removal from individual properties and common areas. By tracking vegetation removal, the State forestry agency that oversees the Firewise program can now access data on the quantities being removed from the participating site’s boundaries. The agency can then share that information with other stakeholders.

Also, the portal has a section that tracks debris removal from an array of sources, including:

- Community-organized curbside fuel pickups,
- Contracted chipping services,
- Local municipal or county department slash pickup,
- Homeowner/property association projects, and
- Other types of contractors.

The portal includes a section for individual homeowners to record slash taken to an offsite disposal location, slash collection days across neighborhoods or communities, and even projects on Wildfire Community Preparedness Day (fig. 4). Included in a recap of each recorded activity is the number of participating residences, the yards of debris removed, and when the activity occurred.

The portal also lists the Firewise USA™ program's State liaisons, who manage their own State-specific data. The end result is a system that's able to assist recognized sites in making themselves safer places to live by becoming more resilient in the face of wildfires.

Other Resources

Homeowners and stakeholders from all wildfire sectors, including forestry agencies, fire departments, and emergency managers, can access Firewise materials and resources



Figure 4—Colorado Springs Fire Department wildfire mitigation crews supporting a local neighborhood chipping event. Photo: Colorado Springs Fire Department.

through Firewise.org. The NFPA invites you to add them to your cache of outreach and education resources.

The newest addition is the Reducing Wildfire Risks in the Home Ignition Zones poster/checklist. The oversized foldout poster has detailed information and graphics that give residents a roadmap to begin their wildfire risk

reduction projects. The resource includes an easy-to-follow checklist for each home ignition zone, listing the tasks that increase a home's survivability when exposed to embers from a wildfire and/or flames from a surface fire. The checklist is a great way for homeowners to begin tracking their accomplishments within the three home ignition zones. ■

Reporting Categories in the Firewise Portal

The Firewise Portal lets users track their mitigation activities by reporting them in the following categories:

- **Dwelling:** Risk reduction work from the roof down to the foundation. Activities include installing fire-resistant roofing, cleaning litter from roofs and gutters, screening vents, installing chimney spark arrestors and screening, ensuring that there are no openings in skylights or siding, enclosing eaves and soffits, clearing decks and porches of flammable materials, ensuring that under-deck areas are free of flammable materials and vegetation, and so forth.
- **Immediate Zone:** 0 to 5 feet (0–1.5 m) from the foundation or attachments (decks/porches). Activities include installing hardscaping components; replacing combustible mulches with stone/gravel; removing trees and shrubs; raking and removing pine needles, leaves, litter, and debris; trimming back tree limbs that

overhang the area; moving firewood into the extended zone; and so forth.

- **Intermediate Zone:** 5 to 30 feet (1.5–9.1 m) from the foundation or attachments (decks/porches). Activities include maintaining the lawn and native grass, clustering trees and shrubs with space between clusters, thinning and limbing trees to reduce crown fire potential, and so forth.
- **Extended Zone:** 30 to 100 feet (9.1–30.5 m) from the foundation or attachments (decks/porches). Activities include removing needles, leaves, litter, and debris; thinning trees to reduce crown fire potential; and so forth.
- **Common Area:** Areas owned by the homeowners association or other jointly owned community property within the site boundary. Activities include thinning trees, conducting mastication and removing brush, maintaining grass, constructing firebreaks, and so forth.
- **Administration:** Meetings, presentations, program oversight, home site visits, and so forth.