



UI Extension Forestry Information Series II

Fire No. 24

Wildfire Evacuation - If You get Trapped

Yvonne Barkley

Wildfires are notoriously unpredictable and even the best laid plans can sometimes go amiss. First know that **sheltering in place IS NOT RECOMMENDED**. Residents should make every attempt to evacuate safely.

But if you do find yourself trapped by a wildfire, there are a few things you can do to decrease risk and injury and increase your chances of survival.

The roar of a wildfire can be extremely loud and the house will get very hot and smoky as the fire front passes, so you must be emotionally prepared to deal with the horrific sound and strong natural urge to flee the house.

Choosing Your Shelter

The most important thing to do is to choose the place from those available to you that is best able to withstand the flaming front of the fire. This may not be your home, but an outbuilding, shop, or even your car. The structure should have:

- A "Class-A," non-combustible roof
- Non-combustible siding or 30 feet or more clearing of vegetation from the siding
- Eave areas and areas under decks boxed in or totally enclosed or cleaned of flammable debris
- 1/8- inch screened attic, foundation, and eave vents
- Dual pane or tempered glass windows

Inside Your Shelter

To survive, you must stay inside the shelter until the fire front passes. Although it will be very hot in the house, it can be four to five times hotter outside. Stay



We do not recommend sheltering in place - every attempt should be made to safely evacuate.

Photo courtesy of © Karen Wattenmaker Photography

in the center of the structure until the fire front passes.

- Close ALL windows and doors; place wet towels under door and window openings.
- Have your fire extinguishers out and ready to use.
- Fill sinks, tubs, and buckets with water to use to extinguish any embers that do enter the space as well as for drinking and flushing toilets.
- Plan for the loss of power and ready flash lights and batteries.
- Disconnect electric garage door openers and operate the door manually.
- Close metal Venetian blinds.
- Remove flammable window treatments and furniture away from windows and sliding glass doors to prevent ignition from radiant heat.
- Shut off all attic fans, whole house fans, swamp coolers, and interior fans to keep smoke and ash

from being drawn into house.

- Wet or remove swamp cooler pads to prevent them from catching on fire.
- Bring pets inside and place them in pet carriers to control their movements.
- Put livestock and horses in an area an irrigated pasture or area where fuels have been removed.
- Leave exterior and interior lights on for as long as you have power; this helps fire fighters to find your house in the dense smoke during a fire.

Outside Your Shelter

- Strategically place sprinklers on your shelter and surroundings and turn them on.
- Close all exterior doors and windows and leave them unlocked.
- Close or cover outside attic, eave, and basement vents to prevent ember from entering structures.
- Move all flammable materials at least 30-feet away from the exterior of the structure you will be sheltering in, including vehicles and recreational equipment, lawn furniture, and firewood.
- Plan for the loss of power and ready emergency generators to power the pump in your well.
- Store water to put out burning embers or small fires after the fire front has passed your house.
- Move wheeled vehicle or equipment away from structures.

- Shut off natural gas and propane.
- Protect hoses from flames and have them ready to use once the fire front has passed.
- Prevent flames from spreading from a fence to your shelter by opening gates.

Trapped in Your Vehicle

A structure will offer more protection than a car, so if there is a building nearby get inside it. If there is no building, park and stay in your car. It will safer than being in the open where you will be directly exposure to flames and radiant heat.

- Find a safe place to park that has little or no vegetation.
- Turn on headlights and emergency flashers to make your car more visible during heavy smoke.
- Close all windows and doors, shut off all air vents, and turn off the air conditioner.
- Stay in the vehicle, as it will provide you with some insulation from the heat.
- Get below the windows under blankets, preferably wool, and lie on the floor to shelter yourself from the intense radiant heat.
- Wait until the fire front passes and temperature has dropped outside then get out and into a safe area that has already burned.

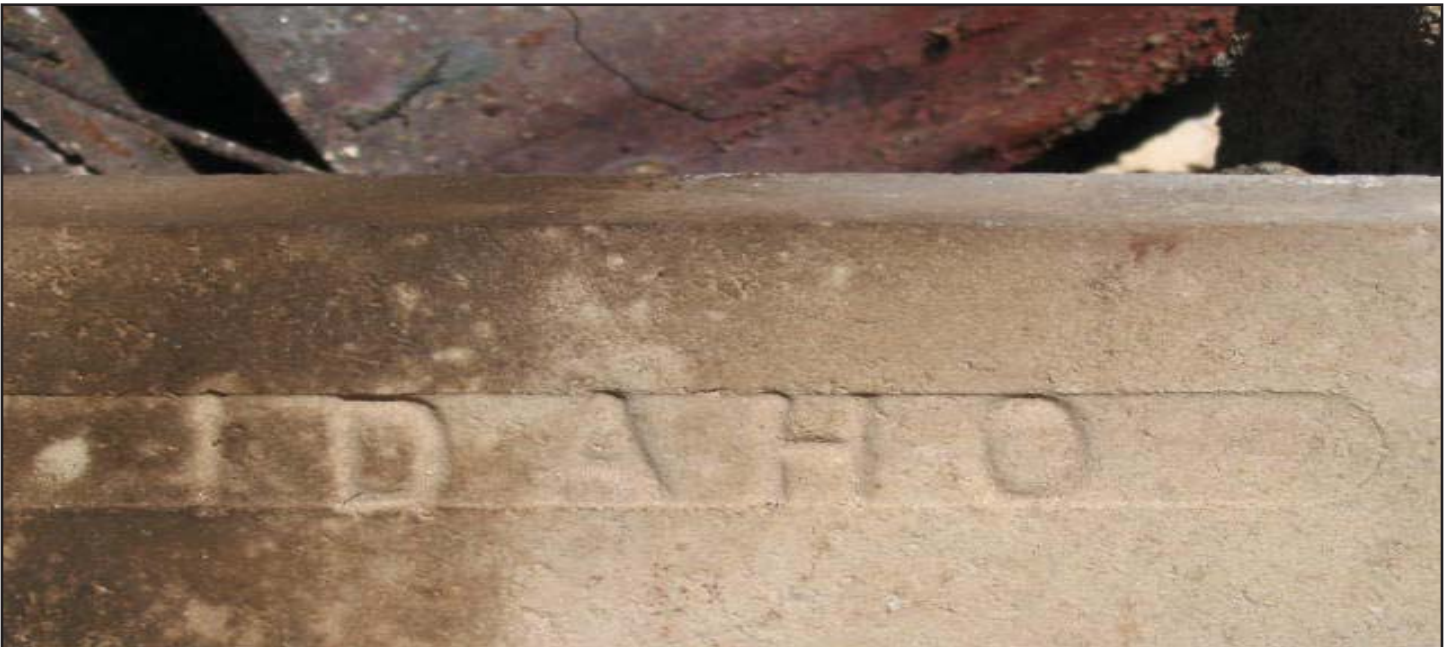


Photo courtesy of Ron Mahoney.