

Firewise Construction Checklist

When constructing, renovating, or adding to a Firewise home, consider the following:

- Choose a firewise location.
- Design and build a firewise structure.
- Employ firewise landscaping and maintenance.

To select a firewise location, observe the following:

- Slope of terrain: be sure to build on the most level portion of the land, since fire spreads more rapidly on a slope (even minor slopes).
- Set your single-story structures at least 30 feet back from any ridge or cliff and increase the distance if your building will be higher than one story.

In designing and building your firewise structure, remember that the primary goals are fuel and exposure reduction.

- Use construction materials that are fire-resistant or non-combustible whenever possible.
- For roof construction, consider using materials such as Class-A asphalt shingles, slate or clay tile, metal, cement and concrete products, or terra-cotta tiles.
- Constructing a fire-resistant sub-roof can add protection.
- On exterior wall cladding, fire resistive materials such as stucco or masonry are much better than vinyl, which can soften and melt.
- Consider both size and materials for windows; smaller panes hold up better in their frames than larger ones; double pane glass and tempered glass are more effective than single pane glass; plastic skylights can melt.
- Cover windows and skylights with non-flammable screening shutters.
- To prevent sparks from entering your home through vents, cover exterior attic and underfloor vents with wire mesh no larger than 1/8 of an inch; make sure under-eave and soffit vents are closer to the roof line than the wall. Box in eaves, but provide adequate ventilation to prevent condensation.
- Include a driveway that is big enough to provide easy access for fire engines. Driveways should be at least 12 feet wide and have a vertical clearance of 15 feet and a slope less than 12 percent. The driveway and access roads should be well maintained, clearly marked, and include ample turnaround space near the house. Also consider access to a water supply if possible.
- Provide at least two ground level doors for safety exits and at least two means of escape—either doors or windows—in each room, so that everyone has a way out of a building in case of emergency.
- Keep gutters, eaves, and roofs clear of leaves and other debris.
- Make an occasional inspection of your home or building, looking for deterioration such as breaks and spaces between roof tiles, warping wood, or cracks and crevices in the structure.
- Inspect your property, clearing dead wood and dense vegetation from at least 30 feet around your house. Move firewood away from the house or attachments, like fences or decks.

Any structures attached to the house, such as decks, porches, fences, and outbuildings should be considered part of the house. These structures can act as fuels or fuel bridges, particularly if constructed from flammable materials. Therefore, consider the following:

- If you wish to attach an all-wood fence to your home, use masonry or metal as a protective barrier between the fence and house.
- Use non-flammable metal when constructing a trellis and cover with high-moisture, non-flammable vegetation.
- Prevent combustible materials and debris from accumulating beneath patio deck or elevated porches; screen under or box in areas below ground line with wire mesh no larger than 1/8 of an inch.
- Make sure an elevated wooden deck is not located at the top of a hill where it will be in direct line of a fire moving up slope; consider a terrace instead.

For additional information: www.firewise.org