

**Safety Zone Article – by Harun Simbirdi  
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**Be Vigilant – Wildland Fires Are Always A Threat**

Wildfire safety is something I wrote about a little over a year ago. This past weekend, while spending time with my 5 year old, I was reminded that we are susceptible to wildfire danger. My son and I were at a church function and, as we were sitting down outside, we began to hear a lot of sirens. Over the next 20-30 minutes, both of us stood on Clayton Road and watched 5-7 fire engines zoom by apparently heading to a brush fire somewhere out on Marsh Creek Road. While it was exciting to watch my son be enthralled by the fire trucks zooming by, his questions and chatter about where they were heading made me realize the seriousness and threat of where we live. This article will help you become more aware of the causes, preparation, and reaction if we have a wildfire in our area.

**Causes and Background**

We live in what fire protection authorities call a Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). Today, more Americans are building homes and living in the WUI – the zone where homes are intermixed with wildland vegetation. One government sponsored study estimates that 44 million homes in the lower 48 states are located in areas that meet or intermingle with wildland vegetation. In the 1990s, 1.7 million new homes were built in the WUI in California, Oregon, and Washington alone – bringing the total of homes contained in the WUI in these three states to nearly 7 million.

According to the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District (CCCYPD) website, in Contra Costa County there are over 4,000 properties that are considered Priority Hazard Zones (PHZ's) and are at greatest risk of wildfires. They are considered PHZ's due to their close proximity to open space, topography, degree of slope, density of homes, amount of vegetation (both native and ornamental), lack of emergency vehicle accessibility, and other conditions favorable to fast-moving and destructive fires.

The conditions are perfect for fires and natural wildland fires are generally caused by lightning, Some fires are caused by sparks from falling rocks. Volcanic activity such as Mount St. Helens, although rare, do cause wildfires as well. Unfortunately, however, human activity is the primary cause of wildland fires. Examples of human activity include (but aren't limited to) - sparks from cars, cigarette butts being tossed out of moving vehicles, fireworks, arson, embers from campfires, etc.

**Steps To Take If A Wildfire Threatens**

First, if you are advised or ordered to evacuate, do so immediately. Follow directions of emergency officials and make sure to take any necessary prescription medications or medical equipment with you. Be sure to wear sturdy shoes or boots, non-flammable clothing, hat, and gloves. Lock your home and follow the designated routes or a safe route away from fire hazards. NOTE: If you're caught in a wildfire and you find yourself trapped in the path of a raging wildfire, you should take the quickest path or route away from the fire immediately.

Second, if there are WARNINGS of a threatening wildfire and you're sure you have time, tune to local radio and television stations for reports and evacuation information. Confine pets to one

room and make plans to care for your pets in case you must evacuate (most evacuation shelters do not allow pets). Arrange temporary housing at a friend or relative's home outside the threatened area.

Third and only if you are sure you have time, do the following; place lawn sprinklers on the roof or connect the garden hose to outside taps, close windows, doors, vents, and window coverings, turn off propane tanks, place patio furniture and plastic play sets inside, take your disaster supplies kit, tell someone when you left and where you are going, shut off utilities (if possible), open your fireplace damper, move flammable furniture into the center of the home, turn on a light in each room to increase the visibility of your home, seal attic and ground vents with precut noncombustible coverings, gather fire tools.

### **How To Prepare Before Wildfire Threatens**

Preparing your home is important. The first is to create a 100 foot defensible space around your property to reduce the fuel that helps make fires worse. The second is to have a family evacuation plan and to know the quickest ways out of your area in the event of a wildfire. For detail on each of these and other important items to prepare your home, please visit [www.claytoncert.org/wildfire](http://www.claytoncert.org/wildfire).

Remember, awareness that we live in a PHZ and WUI should be at the top of our minds. We all should do our best to get informed and to be preparing our homes/properties to minimize the risk associated with living in this area. Watch for activities that could lead to a fire and report anything that looks suspicious. Let's keep our community safe and by visiting the [www.claytoncert.org](http://www.claytoncert.org) website, you'll find more information to help you understand what more can be done.

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