



A CALL TO END THE DESTRUCTION OF COMMUNITIES BY WILDFIRE

Policy 3: Fire departments for communities in the WUI must be prepared to respond safely and effectively to wildfire

The U.S. has witnessed a steady increase in wildfire activity over the past decade, and experts predict this trend will continue. Despite billions of dollars to support wildland fire suppression efforts, the number of homes lost in wildfires per year has increased by 163 percent, and wildfires now cost the U.S. an estimated \$63 to \$285 billion per year in losses.

Local fire departments report that brush, grass, and forest fire incidents account for nearly a quarter of the calls they receive for response each year. Their ability to protect lives, property, and communities from those fires depends on many factors, including the preparedness of residents and business owners. However, other factors—mainly equipment and training—influence how safe and effective their response will be. Alarming, many fire departments serving communities in the wildland/urban interface (WUI) lack these basics. While state and federal agencies also perform wildland firefighting, the scope of those services differs significantly from the duties of local fire departments and generally does not extend to protecting homes.

In preparation for a future with more wildfire activity, communities must prioritize resources to ensure their first responders are properly prepared and equipped.

According to NFPA's latest report, Fourth Needs Assessment of the U.S. Fire Service, 88 percent of U.S. fire departments—some 23,000 departments—provide wildland and/or WUI firefighting services. Of those, 63 percent have not formally trained all their personnel involved in these activities. Only 32 percent have all their responders equipped with appropriate personal protection equipment (PPE), and 26 percent do not have any of the necessary PPE at all. Only 27 percent of departments have a health and fitness program. These gaps in training and personal protection—and possibly physical capacity—to fight wildland fires that threaten homes and businesses paint a dire picture for firefighter health and safety. For the years 2011 to 2015, wildfires caused an average of 1,330 fireground injuries to local fire department personnel each year.

Fire departments acknowledge their capacity to respond to wildfires threatening their communities would likely become overwhelmed very quickly. For example, 64 percent of U.S. fire departments reported they could manage structure protection for a maximum of two to five structures during a single wildfire incident. More than half, 52 percent, reported they could manage, at a maximum, responding to a wildfire event of just 1 to 10 acres. These numbers belie the belief of many Americans that the fire service will always have the capacity to respond to any fire or emergency event and mount successful rescues and saves.

In preparation for a future with more wildfire activity, communities must prioritize resources to ensure their first responders are properly prepared and equipped. It is critical that local fire officials also undertake efforts to align fitness and health standards for wildland firefighting with those of the federal firefighting fitness standards. Communities whose local fire departments lack capacity to cope with large fires must develop and maintain mutual aid agreements with their neighbors to increase their response capabilities. And the public must also understand that while the response of the fire department in a wildfire event is critical, firefighters will be much less successful in an unprepared community, so residents must take action to prepare their own homes and neighborhoods ahead of a wildfire event.

Given the size and scope of the U.S. wildfire challenge, reaching the goals of a comprehensive wildfire strategy, including preparing and equipping local fire departments with the proper resources, training, and personal protective equipment, will take time. But making progress toward all of these will reduce the risk to American homes, businesses, and prosperity. **The key to ending the destruction of communities by wildfire is to start now.**

Learn more about Outthink Wildfire by visiting nfpa.org/wildfirepolicy.

CITATIONS AND REFERENCES

www.nfpa.org/wildfirepolicy



RESOURCES

- [NFPA: Needs Assessment of the U.S. Fire Service report](#)
- [NFPA WUI Readiness Infographic](#)

The National Fire Protection Association® (NFPA®) outlined a comprehensive strategy that will push for the transformations that, over time, will significantly reduce risk to communities. The strategy is rooted in two realities—wildfires are going to happen, and the fire service will not be able to extinguish wildfires at a pace to save people and property in their path.

To solve the wildfire problem, these five tenets must be supported by all levels of government:

- 1. Require all homes and businesses in the wildland/urban interface (WUI) to be more resistant to ignition from wildfire embers and flames.**
- 2. Current codes and standards, as well as sound land use practices, must be in use and enforced for new development and rebuilding in wildfire-prone areas.**
- 3. Fire departments for communities in the WUI must be prepared to respond safely and effectively to wildfire.**
- 4. Government must increase resources for vegetative fuel management.**
- 5. The public must understand its role and take action in reducing wildfire risk.**



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WILDFIRE ACTION POLICIES

