



Message from the Fire Chief

Fire Prevention Week 2019: October 6 – 12

For fire prevention week this year we are focusing on the FireSmart program, and some things you can do to reduce risks from wildfires. One of the tools talked about at community engagement presentations last fall, FireSmart offers rural residents, farms and ranches specific tools and recommendations that reduce wildfire risks.

Growing up on a farm in Special Areas gave me a great opportunity to enjoy rural life. But rural living often means accepting some inherent risks, including those resulting from living near – and often in the middle - of wildland and intermix areas. You invest a lot into your operation. How are you protecting your assets? One approach is to ensure your assets are adequately insured, and to trust insurance will cover any damages or costs. A more active approach is to take a closer look at our homes, farms and ranches to help understand and mitigate hazards. FireSmart is a program which understands we can't always prevent fires; however, it can help us live with and manage the risks they pose.

We are all aware of the dangers of grassfires, especially after the last few very active fire seasons. This awareness has translated into changes in how many ranches and farms are approaching fire prevention in their yards and on their operations. Our goal this fire prevention week is to share some tips on how you can reduce your risks from wildfires, and to encourage you to reach out to your local fire department for more FireSmart information or a FireSmart assessment for your operation.

FireSmart helps minimize the risks wildfires pose by increasing wildfire resistance and applying fire prevention concepts. This national initiative gives individuals, families and communities tools to help understand how wildfires might threaten them and their property, and what steps they can take to reduce these risks. FireSmart looks at two components when assessing for fire probability: structure assessment and site assessment. The structural assessment is based on buildings, their materials and their corresponding resistance to heat and flame. For example, a structure built out of cement or brick, with metal roofing would provide significant resistance to a wildfire. A structure constructed out of wood with limited metal or cement materials and asphalt shingles would provide much less resistance to wildfire. The site assessment portion looks at location. For example, a farm site built on a slope, or adjacent to wooded areas, would present a higher risk of being impacted by a wildfire. A farm site built on flat ground surrounded by cultivated land would likely present a lower risk of being impacted. Beyond the characteristics of a particular site itself, other factors considered in the site assessment include distance to fire services and ease of access to the site.

A FireSmart assessment would use tools to assess structures and the larger site to see how susceptible they are to fire and what actions would reduce or mitigate those risks. When doing a FireSmart site assessment, all structures are assessed, from grain bins and cattle sheds to houses and shops. FireSmart priority zones outline four zones that surround structures and highlight the different levels of fire control activities recommended for each area. The most critical of these zones is Zone 1a, the area directly around your structure. This zone extends 1.5 meters (5 feet) and is considered a non-combustible zone. A defensible space which doesn't support a fire, this zone should help reduce the chance of wind-blown embers igniting materials near (or on) your structure. Ideally, this area should be free of all vegetation: dirt, rocks, brick, cement, etc. Some things to think about include: avoiding wood chips or mulch, not stacking firewood or



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storing flammable materials like oil, not storing equipment, and keeping waste from accumulating. If there are burnable materials in this zone, they will give wildfire a clear path to impinge onto your structure. If you do have landscaping or grass in this zone, be sure to keep it well watered and maintained.

Zone 1, which extends 1.5 to 10 meters (5 to 30 feet) is also considered to be a defensible zone. Some things to consider when assessing this zone include identifying materials present that could transmit fire through this zone to your structure, including fences, decks, trees, shrubs and landscaping. Other things to think about include the types and locations of trees. Limiting conifer trees and junipers helps reduce risk as they will combust more readily than deciduous trees like poplars. Keeping branches trimmed away from roofs and trimming them a meter from the ground will limit the risk of fire travelling up the tree onto your structure. If you have a wooden fence that connects to your structure, consider placing a metal gate between your structure and the fence. This will create a break between your structure and combustible materials, helping to reduce the risk of fire tracking from the fence to your structure. Other things to look at include keeping BBQs away from vinyl siding and overhanging eaves, regularly cleaning eavestroughs to limit burnable materials there, ensuring fireplaces/woodstoves have intact spark arrestors, checking under decking for burnable materials (leaves, waste material, etc.), or even installing a skirting around your deck to help limit burnable materials.

Zone 2 extends 10 to 30 meters (30 to 90 feet), and Zone 3 extends 30 to 100 meters (90 to 300 feet) from your structure. These two zones help identify how to reduce potential wildfire fuel and limit risk of wildfires travelling through these zones towards your structure. Some of the recommendations we see out of these areas include how to limit risk with stored feed locations, shelter belt maintenance, burning barrel recommendations, fire guard construction and maintenance, prescribed burns, and planning future development of your farm site.

We cannot eliminate fires but using FireSmart to help analyze and mitigate risks on your property can limit and manage its impacts. FireSmart is easy to understand, gives useful and specific ideas on what you can do now (and in the future), and is free. In closing, I encourage everyone to take a moment to consider what you can do to help reduce your risks from wildfires. If you would like more information on the FireSmart program, or to request a free FireSmart Assessment for your property or operation, please contact us. You can reach Special Areas Fire Services at (403) 779-3733, through your local district office or fire department.

As always, remember to *“Check your Smoke Detector, CO Detector and Have Two Ways Out”*.

Take Care, Keep Safe, and Yours in Fire Prevention,

Glen Durand,
Special Areas Fire Chief