



Wildland/Urban Interface

BP-18

Department of Building and Planning

What is it?

The wildland/urban interface is considered to be those areas where development and the “wildland” interface and which are prone to wildfires or the rapid spread of wildfires under certain climatic conditions. Factors including fuels, slope of the land, and climate are all taken into consideration when determining whether or not property is susceptible to wildfire.

Locally, the wildland/urban interface is considered to encompass much of the unincorporated areas of the county.

What does this mean to me?

First and foremost, it means your property is, or may be prone to wildfire, depending upon its location.

Secondly, to help minimize potential damages from a wildfire, certain minimum mitigating measures should be employed to reduce structure exposure to wildfires.

- A “defensible space” should be created around all structures. Essentially, this is an area ranging from 30 to 100 feet, depending on the slope of your land, around structures, which has been cleared of combustible materials. A well pruned and watered landscape will provide a defensible space. **The defensible space is one of the most effective measures you can undertake to help against the spread of wildfire.**
- Roads and driveways which are less than 20 feet in width need 10 feet of clearance of trees and brush on each side of the road. This provides emergency personnel adequate access to your property.
- In addition, certain mitigating measures relative to building construction are required by code:
 - ✓ Roofing materials need to carry a minimum “Class C” rating, which is a method to recognize the fire performance characteristics of a roof covering material. While the choice of roof covering is not in and of itself a guarantee of

fire safety, non-rated roofing is recognized as a major contributing factor to fire spread and exposure problems in fire control.

- ✓ Decks and balconies need to be constructed with a minimum nominal 2 inch wood decking, non-combustible, or protected on the underside with materials approved for one-hour construction. This has been proven an effective construction technique in other areas in providing greater resistance to fire.
- ✓ Attic/roof vents need to be screened with non-combustible wire mesh. These ventilation points have a tendency to draw fire into the attic under wildfire situations. By using non-combustible materials some restraint in fire spread is built into the structure.
- ✓ Chimneys require spark arrester/outlet screens to reduce potential wildfire ignition sources.

What other types of requirements have been developed to help address problems encountered during wildfires?

- Standards are in place for private driveways and “fire apparatus access roads” to help assure ingress and egress for fire and medical emergencies (see brochure BP-17 *Driveways* and BP-28 *Fire Apparatus Access Road Standards*).
- Street and building identification/addressing requirements are in effect to facilitate property location and avoid delays during emergency response situations (see brochure BP-39 *Property Addresses*).
- Water supply requirements are in effect in those areas with water systems to help assure adequate water supplies.

Where can I find out more?

Various publications are available which identify measures that can be taken to further reduce the potential for wildfire and the spread of wildfire on your property. Contact the Spokane County Department of Building and Planning, local Fire District offices, or the Washington State Department of Natural Resources for further information.

For more information or an appointment contact:

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