

TORREON

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Many Arizona residents own homes in or near the forests, woodlands, chaparral, and grasslands to take advantage of the amenities of living in a natural environment. Torreon is just such a community. Fire protection for our homes in this rural and remote community is limited when compared to living in an urban area. However, there is a great deal homeowners can do to prepare their property for wildfire. The Torreon Community Association offers the following information to help Torreon homeowners create an action plan that will mitigate wildfire hazards.

Fire is unpredictable. It can find the weak link in your home's fire protection scheme and gain the upper hand because of a small, overlooked or seemingly inconsequential factor.

Two factors have emerged as the primary determinants of a home's ability to survive wildfire. These are the home's roofing material and the quality of the "defensible space" surrounding it. Adherence to the following checklist will give your home a fighting chance if wildfire occurs.



1. Roof

- Tree branches touching or overhanging the roof have been removed.
- Tree branches within 10 feet of the chimney have been removed.
- All dead leaves and needles have been cleaned from the roof and gutters.
- Roof meets the Uniform Building Code fire resistance classification of "Class B" or better.
- Chimney outlet and stovepipe covered with a nonflammable screen of 1/2 inch or smaller mesh that is in good condition.

2. Construction

- Home placement is away from ridge tops, canyons and areas between high points on a ridge.
- Home placement is at least 20 feet from the property line.
- House is constructed with fire resistive building materials.
- Attic, roof, eaves and foundation vents are screened and in good condition.
- Underside of balconies and above ground decks are enclosed with fire resistive materials.
- Size and number of windows that face large areas of vegetation are limited.
- Windows are dual-paned or triple-paned glass construction.

3. Landscape

- A “defensible space” has been created by modifying flammable vegetation around all structures.
- On steep slopes, flammable vegetation has been modified out to a distance greater than that of level home sites.
- Trees and shrubs thinned pursuant to Torreon Architectural Guidelines.
- Branches of remaining trees are pruned 8-10 feet above ground fuel.
- Landscape plants are resistive to fire and burning. (See attached suggestions regarding how to choose firewise plants.)
- Grass and weeds are mowed to a low height.
- The number of trees in heavily wooded areas is reduced by thinning.
- All plants are maintained regularly by removing dead branches, leaves and needles.

4. Yard

- Woodpiles are stacked away from all structures and flammable vegetation is cleared away within 10 feet of woodpiles.
- There is an easily accessible tool storage area with rakes, hoes, axes and shovels for use in case of fire.
- All construction materials and debris are removed from the yard.

5. Access

- All exit routes from your neighborhood are identified.
- Driveways are constructed to allow emergency equipment to reach your house.
- Flammable vegetation is cleared away from roads and driveways.
- Overhanging tree branches above roads and driveways are removed.
- House address is readily visible and readable at the beginning of the driveway, or on the house if easily visible from the road.

6. Outside

- Your escape routes, meeting points and other details are known and understood by all family members.
- You have practiced family fire drills and your fire evacuation plan.
- Electric service lines, fuse boxes and circuit breaker panels are installed and maintained as prescribed by code.

Additionally, fire extinguishers are checked and in good condition.

Please remember that Section 2.0.1 (Lot Maintenance) of the Torreon Architectural Guidelines states:

It is the owners' responsibility to maintain each lot so as to reduce fire danger and insect infestation. Owners are required to remove and dispose of infested and dead trees according to accepted methods.

Prior to selective clearing of brush or trees 5” in diameter or less, notification must be submitted to the A.R.C. Caution should be exercised in the selection process.

Removal of trees over 5” in diameter and/or located in open space, golf course property or adjacent properties is prohibited.

Established preventive measures are weekly deep-water irrigation, certain approved chemical applications and timely applications of nutrients. (Torreon Community Association recommends a licensed professional be hired to assist with any of these items).

The City of Show Low is a prime resource for firewise information and assistance. They offer lists of local contractors and suggestions on how to hire qualified, reputable contractors.

City Code prescribes specific requirements for maintenance of a healthy forest. Sec. 9-4-4 (Maintenance of land, building and structures) of the Code states, in part:

Every person who owns any land, building or structure in the City shall keep and maintain the land, building or structure in a manner which is free of:

1. Overgrown vegetation that interferes with or obstructs or renders dangerous the free passage or use of sidewalks, roadways, streets, public rights-of-way or easements; or obstructs or blocks the vision of drivers and their ability to observe traffic-control devices or signs;
2. Any plant growth which is dead or dormant and is so dry as to be readily flammable or combustible such that it creates a fire hazard or other threat to the public health or safety; (in determining whether a fire hazard exists, the factors to be considered shall include the relative fire hazard of surrounding properties);
3. Any noxious or toxic weed which poses a health or safety hazard to the public;
4. Any trees which constitute a public nuisance, or which present a danger to persons, property, or other vegetation. For purposes of this subsection, a tree shall be deemed a public nuisance and be deemed detrimental to the public health and safety if:
 - (a) It appears dead, dangerous, or likely to fall; or
 - (b) It appears to be infected with infectious diseases, parasites or insects, including, but not limited to, bark beetles;

The University of Arizona Cooperative Extension is another excellent reference, and is, in fact, the source of the bulk of this bulletin. Their website has an abundance of helpful information, including "How to Hire a Tree Expert" and "Creating Wildfire-Defensible Spaces for Your Home and Property." (<http://ag.arizona.edu/extension>)

In summary, it is important to take steps now to protect your home from a future wildfire. This can spell the difference between your property's destruction and survival.

Choosing Firewise Plants

All vegetation, naturally occurring and otherwise, is potential fuel for fire. Its type, amount and arrangement can have dramatic effects on fire behavior. There are no “fireproof” plant species. Plant choice, spacing and maintenance are critical; where and how you plant can be more important than what species you use. However, given options, choose plant species for your landscape that are more fire resistant.

Keep in mind these general concepts when choosing firewise plant species for your home landscape plan:

- A plant’s moisture content is the most important factor governing its volatility. However, resin content and other factors in some species keep them flammable even when the plant is well watered. Conifers such as pines, firs, spruces, junipers, and Arizona cypress tend to be flammable due their oil and pitch content, regardless of moisture status or content.
- Deciduous plants tend to be more fire resistant, because their leaves have higher moisture content. Also, when trees drop their leaves in the winter, there is less fuel to carry fire through their canopies.

In some cases, drought tolerance and fire resistance are related. Here are some general plant characteristics that can provide drought tolerance and increase fire resistance in your landscape:

- Plants that shed their leaves or needles in extreme drought.
- Drought-adapted plants that have smaller leaves or very succulent leaves that store water.
- Salt tolerant plants that show natural fire resistance. A notable exception is salt cedar, which is highly salt tolerant but contains extremely volatile oils and burns very hot.

Plants that are more resistant to wildfire have one or more of the following characteristics:

- They grow without accumulating large amounts of combustible dead branches, needles, or leaves (e.g. aspen).
- They have open, loose branches with a low volume of total vegetation (e.g. currant and mountain mahogany).
- They have low resin content (many deciduous species).
- They have high-moisture content (succulents and some herbaceous plants).
- They grow slowly and do not need frequent pruning.
- They are short and grow close to the ground, such as small wildflowers and non-coniferous groundcovers.
- They can re-establish following a fire, reducing the costs of planting new trees (aspen, locust).

REMEMBER TO REFER TO YOUR TORREON APPROVED PLANT LIST PRIOR TO PLANTING ANY NEW VEGETATION.