



NIP GROUP

Wildfires



This fire season is setting up to be possibly one of the worst in history. Temperatures have been the hottest for years across much of the country, and a persistent drought is drying out tinder in many vulnerable areas in the West and Northwest. Although fire season is a perennial challenge in California, the scale and destruction of fires in recent years have shattered records, with 2020 topping them all. Experts are warning that 2021 can be even worse.

The unprecedented frequency and severity of wildfires is a result of record drought, unprecedented tree mortality, record rainfall, record heat waves, and extremely strong wind events. The California Department of Forestry and the U.S. Forest Service estimate that there are over 102 million dead trees in California because of a five-year drought and bark beetle infestation that has created unparalleled ecological destruction. The dead trees are acting as kindling and creating a heightened risk of wildfires, which burn hotter and spread more quickly in dead forests.

Record-breaking wildfires have been occurring more often. Eight of the 10 largest fires in California history have burned in the past decade. In fact, The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) estimates the total costs of wildfires in just 2017 and 2018 to be more than \$40 billion. If the area in which you work is at risk for wildfires, it is imperative to prepare your property and staff for an event.

Below are several steps you can take to make your property more resistant to wildfire:

- Remove dead vegetation from plants and lower branches from tall trees.
- Keep the gutters, roof and outdoor spaces free of debris like leaves and twigs.
- Clear out window screens and attic vents.
- Move firewood and other combustible materials at least 30 feet from the house.
- Use roofing materials with a Class A fire rating (the highest).
- Install metal angle flashing at the edge of the roof.
- Box-in eaves that have an open construction (i.e., where rafter tails are visible).
- Install metal flashing where wood decking meets the siding (if the siding is combustible).
- Replace single-pane windows with multi-pane, tempered glass windows with screens.



NIP GROUP

info@nipgroup.com • 800.446.7647 • www.nipgroup.com





Another important step in reducing wildfire risk is the creation of defensible space zones. Think of defensible space zones as a layer of protection between your house or business and the approaching wildfire.

The area closest to your building is the most vulnerable — it should be most aggressively maintained, where all fuels for a fire are removed and immovable objects are modified to be fire resistant. Replace jute or fiber door mats with fire resistant materials. Remove or relocate all combustible materials, including garbage and recycling containers, lumber and trash. Clean all fallen leaves and needles regularly and repeat often during each season. Remove tree limbs that extend into this defensible zone, ensuring there is no vegetation or limbs within five feet of structures.

Outside of the immediate area (anything within 10 feet of a structure), you could still take steps to further protect your business. Remove dead plants, grass, dry leaves, and pine needles from your yard. Trim trees regularly to keep branches a minimum of 10 feet from other trees. Remove branches that hang over your roof, and keep dead branches 10 feet away from your chimney. Cut or mow annual grass down to a maximum height of four inches. You could also check with your local fire department for any additional defensible space or weed abatement ordinances. In addition to the risk of loss to your company's property, organizations should take steps to reduce the risk of liability from starting a fire. You must ensure employees are knowledgeable on fire safety and how to prevent the spread of a fire. Organizations are recommended to implement the following risk management steps:

1. Offer new employee orientation and annual refresher training for all field staff addressing fire safety and wildfire risks.
2. Incorporate wildfire risk situational awareness into mandatory daily briefings.
3. Equip each crew with fire fighting equipment and training on proper use.
4. Set restrictions or prohibit burning, blasting, welding, smoking (no smoking policy) and driving off roads.
5. Properly document work site conditions and operations performed.
6. Establish equipment safe handling, including proper cool down periods and guidelines.
7. Establish and enforce refueling policies and procedures of all equipment and vehicles.
8. Implement a Hot Work program and applicable training for all employees.
9. Consider the use of an expert consulting firm to perform inspections of your workplace and field operations to help mitigate risk and implement best practices.

NIP Group's proprietary Learning Management System (LMS), the Vault, has excellent online training courses including those on fire safety, establishing emergency plans, fire extinguisher use, and hot work permits/programs. Please reach out to your risk control representative for more details.