Like many of us, you have chosen to live in the countryside, surrounded by the beauty of aromatic pine trees, lofty mountains, spring wildflowers, and a wide variety of wildlife. Ironically, this is also an area of high wildfire danger called the Wildland/Urban Interface.

What exactly is the **Wildland/Urban Interface** or WUI (pronounced woo-eee)? In a nutshell, the WUI is where the trees meet the houses.

Before European settlement in the West, the forests were in a much more open condition than what we see today. For ten thousand years before European settlement, the Native People were excellent stewards of the forest. As they moved down slope from summer camps to winter camps in the valley, small low-intensity ground fires were lit, thus reducing brush and ladder fuels and improving habitat for hunting and plant material gathering. Between more frequent lightning storms and Native People’s stewardship in the past prior to 1850, the forests were much more open and healthy than our forests today.

![Photo](photo C Koos Breazeal)

According to pioneer journals of the late 1800’s, they could ride their horses among the forest trees without ducking down or getting knocked off by dense brush fields and ladder fuels. (Ladder fuels are the smaller trees and brush that allow fire to travel from the ground up into the higher reaches of the tree.)

Even as recently as the 1950s, ranchers would often follow the same fall burning practice as a way to maintain spring and summer grazing areas for their sheep and cattle. By the late 1950s, however, many of the larger ranch holdings on the west slope of the Central Sierra were sold off as large rural subdivisions for vacation cabins punctuated with narrow, winding dirt and gravel roads.

Originally intended as 2- to 3-acre vacation cabin parcels similar to those in the Pocono Mountains of the East Coast, large subdivisions like Amador Pines morphed into full-time residences as original owners retired and also built out as new homes during the urban escape of the 1980s and 90s.

Many of these residents came to the West Slope from urban Southern California or the Bay Area, and were used to small lots with privacy fences. Now faced with a 2-acre lot, privacy fences were out of the question, so homeowners allowed the brush to build up around the homes as a living privacy fence.
While that will definitely add to your privacy and give you the feeling of “living in the forest,” you could also be contributing to the loss of your home and your neighbors’ homes, as well as increasing your homeowner’s insurance when wildfire comes through your community.

Some homeowners also allow the brush to grow thickly along the edge of their street, but this “tree tunnel” effect can also affect first responders’ ability to access your property in case of medical emergency or fire, and can also impede evacuation.

So what can you do to maintain your privacy and keep fire safe? First, be sure you have a good clearance around your home. One hundred feet is the law and this is easily achieved by dividing your house perimeter into 3 zones.

By no means do you have to have a xeriscape free of plants. A wise selection of landscaping plants will allow you to beautify your residence, maintain the soil, keep your house cooler in the summer, and reduce dust in our Mediterranean summer. Raking to bare mineral is also discouraged, since this can expose thin forest soils to erosion. Instead, plan on leaving a 2-3 inch layer of organic material on the open ground.

Given enough heat or drought conditions, any plant can burn, but the varieties listed below can give you an attractive, inviting fire-resistant landscape. Most of these plants will adapt to a broad elevation range and USDA plant zone range.
Find examples of fire resistant species in the tables below. For additional lists, see Resources in back.

**In Zone 1**, the 10 feet immediately surrounding your home, the landscaping should be “lean and green.” Keep plantings to a minimum and be sure the plants have soft green leaves, no dead wood, and no resin. This is a good spot for low-growing groundcovers and planting beds irrigated with water-wise drip systems. See the chart below for ideas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rock Cress, <em>Aubrieta deltoidea</em></td>
<td>Mat-forming, spreading perennial with grayish-green foliage. Attractive masses of flowers in spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpet bugleweed, <em>Ajuga reptans</em></td>
<td>bronze, purple, variegated, and dark green foliage with flower spikes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinnikinnick, <em>Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</em></td>
<td>mat-forming shrub with glossy-green leaves, pinkish–white flowers in spring, followed by red berries in the fall. Reddish fall color.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahala mat, <em>Ceanothus prostratus</em></td>
<td>Low growing groundcover for higher elevations; leathery foliage, blue flowers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dianthus varieties</td>
<td>A long-term gardener favorite, colorful carnation-like flowers and gray foliage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceplant varieties</td>
<td>Succulent foliage, many colors; better at lower elevations below the snow belt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creeping Phlox, <em>Phlox subulata</em></td>
<td>Popular colorful summer favorite, long blooming, low growing mound-like character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese pachysandra, <em>Pachysandrus terminalis</em></td>
<td>Dark green foliage, small white flowers; good for shade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sedum varieties</td>
<td>Great for rock gardens; low growing succulent, gray-green foliage; many are drought tolerant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creeping Thyme, <em>Thymus praecox</em></td>
<td>Low, fragrant ground over, green and variegated foliage, massing mound, colorful flowers; excellent for rock walls</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hens and Chicks, *Sempervivum species*  
Perennial favorite, green succulent with rosette-shaped foliage

Speedwell, *Veronica species*  
Low groundcover with green or wooly leaves; showy bloomer; excellent with rock gardens

**For Zone 2** in the 30 foot home perimeter, you will want to thin and space trees, limb up lower branches so that you have 8 – 10 feet of clear space between the lowest hanging branches and the ground. Remove ladder fuels. Ladder fuels are the smaller brush, shrubs, and bushes that can act as a ladder, allowing a ground fire to travel up the shrub and into the adjacent trees. This is an excellent location for well-spaced groupings of ornamental, one-of-a-kind shrubs and larger blooming perennials.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monkeyflower, <em>Mimulus</em></td>
<td>Drought tolerant and Firewise; showy and colorful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lavenders, <em>Lavandula species</em></td>
<td>Fragrant, drought tolerant; although has scented oils, it is slow to ignite; space well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sage varieties, <em>Salvia</em></td>
<td>Many color choices, adds spiky dimensions to plant groupings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarrow, <em>Achillea species</em></td>
<td>Fernlike foliage with colorful long-lasting blooms; nice texture in the garden; cut back in fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbine, <em>Aquilegia species</em></td>
<td>A dainty favorite tucked into a shady spot; reseeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delphinium varieties</td>
<td>Tall spiky flowers; excellent background or border; blues, purples, whites, pinks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coneflower, <em>Echinacea purpurea</em></td>
<td>Great perennial addition to the herb bed; large daisy-like flowers, late summer bloomer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Blanket flower, *Gaillardia varieties* | Long-lasting perennial favorite; deadhead for continuous bloom; red, burgundy flowers
---|---
Coreopsis species | Long-lived perennial with single and double daisy-like yellow and orange flowers
Grayleaf cranesbill, *Geranium cinereum* | Graygreen foliage, a mounding growth Habit; pink, white magenta flowers; good as groundcover or in rock gardens
Daylily, *Hemerocallis species* | Popular perennial, excellent for borders or in mass plantings; better flowers when irrigated; yellow, gold, red; late summer
Coralbells, *Heuchera sanguinea* | Low growing foliage with spiky floral stalk; light shade preferred; red, white, pink
Hosta Lily, *Hosta* species | Harks back to Grandma’s garden; lovely green and variegated foliage; mounding
Iris hybrids, previously *Iris germanica* | Swordlike foliage with large flowers, many colors; dividable every 3 years.
Lupine, *Lupinus* varieties | Another tall, showy border plant, many colors, early summer bloomer
Lamb’s ear, *Stachys byzantina* | Excellent for borders; velvety gray-green leaves with purple floral spike
Ornamental (not native) St John’s Wort, *Hypericum* | Excellent for borders or mass beds; hardy, soft colorful foliage and long-lasting yellow blooms; generally deer resistant; full sun

### Shrubs for Zone 2 and 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oregon Grape, <em>Mahonia aquifolium</em></td>
<td>Shrub, shiny dark green leaves turning reddish in fall; yellow flowers followed by blue-black berries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daphne, <em>Daphne x burkwoodii</em></td>
<td>Compact, evergreen, early fragrant flowers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Rhododendron, <em>Rhododendron macrophyllum</em></td>
<td>Pacific Northwest native with pink/purple flowers in spring, dark green foliage; full/part sun; prefers acidic soil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vine maple, <em>Acer circinatum</em></td>
<td>Pacific Northwest native; upright shrub growth to 15 feet; fall color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rocky Mountain maple, <em>Acer glabrum</em></td>
<td>Large shrub/small tree; red twigs; fall color</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Dogwoods, *Cornus species***  
Many sizes & varieties; native/ornamental; showy flowers followed by fall fruits

**Mockorange, *Philadelphus species***  
6-8 foot shrub; fragrant flowers, green foliage; hardy

**Trees for Zone 3**, continue spacing with 20 feet between each tree’s branches and the neighboring tree’s branches. Alternatively, you can plant in clumps, with a clear 20 feet between each clump.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conifers: Ponderosa pines and western larch are the most fire-resistant due to thick bark on trees 20+ years of age</td>
<td>These should be spaced with 20 feet between closest branches, and used as focal points in the landscape.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Maples, Acer species</em></td>
<td>Excellent fall color; use these as single planting focal points in the Zone 3 landscape.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Alders, Mountain and Red, Alnus species</em></td>
<td>Foliage; prefer moist area; use as single planting focal point or small group cluster well-spaced from other trees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Dogwoods, Cornus species</em></td>
<td>Many sizes &amp; varieties; native/ornamental; showy flowers followed by fall fruits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ash, Fraxinus species</em></td>
<td>Large tree 40-60 feet, rounded crown; fall colors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### American sweetgum, *Liquidambar styraciflua*
Popular suburban and urban shade tree; fall colors;

### Western or California sycamore, *Platanus racemosa*
Fast growing, dark green leaves, multi-colored bark.

### Mountain ash, *Sorbus aucuparia*
Mid-sized tree, 20-30 feet; showy spring flowers followed by long-lasting small red fruits; attractive to wildlife including bear

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**THE LAWN**

Periodically during the spring and early summer, you will probably also need to cut back grasses to 3-4 inches. Most of us gave up our lawn mowers when we made the move, so the best tool for grass mowing will likely be a string weed-eater. Using a string trimmer will reduce the chance of unintended fire starts, which may occur if a bladed machine strikes a rock. Some weed-eaters have an optional metal blade, but you should exercise extreme caution using a metal blade. If you cut early enough in the season, a string trimmer should be sufficient for the job. Never use a metal blade during the dry months from May through November.

If you think of an open and park-like setting, you will be well on your way to a fire safe and Firewise home.

(C Koos Breazeal)

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**HOW TO DISPOSE OF YOUR YARD PRUNINGS**

When you start limbing up trees for that initial removal of ladder fuels, you may find yourself with a pile of brush in need of disposal. There are several options: rent or hire a chipper and compost the byproduct; haul the material to the landfill, mulch plant, or biomass waste facility; or burn the material in a safe and responsible manner. If you choose to burn, *“Do it right, at the right time of day, in the right season.”*
If you chose to dispose of your prunings with burn piles, be sure to acquire a burn permit (fee) from the local air district, as well as a dooryard burn permit from CALFIRE (free). Always call the burn line phone number prior to lighting your fire, listen to the whole message, and periodically check the number during the day while you are burning. If conditions change, burning could be cancelled at any time throughout the day. Amador County’s burn line is 209-223-6246.

Plan ahead of time where your burn pile will be located – rake the area completely down to mineral soil in at least a 20-foot perimeter around the burn pile. Look up – are there any overhanging branches that may catch fire or scorch? Give yourself good overhead clearance.

Check the weather – if winds are forecast, plan to burn another day when the air is calm. If you can feel the wind on your face or tree branches are moving, choose another day.

Stay away from slopes, as your burning material may roll downhill outside your safe perimeter. Have a garden hose with a sprayer nozzle attached. By attaching a sprayer nozzle, you can leave the faucet on and charged. Keep the faucet turned on and the hose charged during your entire burn time, as well as the next day or two. Even after you put the fire out, keep periodically raking and checking for heat using the back of your hand. Fires have been known to run underground, following tree roots; then up to a week later, it may resurface above ground and re-ignite where least expected.

Minimum tools should be a metal rake and shovel. Also recommended is a hay or garden fork – very useful for lifting additional material onto the pile. Keep a cordless or cell phone nearby in case of emergency. Creature comforts like a chair, snacks and coffee will help you prepare to spend a number of hours with the burn pile.

We recommend “swamper piles.” Keep your active burn pile small – 3 x 3 feet – and hand-feed it from a non-burning swamper or stock pile about 20 feet away.

By keeping the burn pile small and adding material to it, you can better manage the amount of time you spend, and can easily put the pile out if the weather or conditions change.

First and foremost, keep the material you wish to burn dry. By staging your material ahead of Burn Day in a swamper pile, you only need to tarp that pile. On warm dry days, uncover the pile, but if you see a hint of moisture in the forecast, get that tarp back on the piles.

To build the active burn pile, begin by raking to bare mineral soil in a circle at least 20 to 25 feet across. You can also dig down 4-6 inches in the center to make a depression. This helps prevent roll-out. Take a paper grocery sack filled 2/3 with crumbled newspaper and place in
the center of the pit. Lightly press the sack to compact. Begin as you would a campfire, with small sticks placed across the paper sack, and then larger sticks.

If you follow these guidelines, there is **no need** to use lighter fluid, kerosene or gasoline to light your fire.

Use a match or barbecue wand lighter and ignite the crumbled newspaper inside the paper bag. Have larger branches nearby and ready to add as the fire takes hold. Once burning well, continue to add larger branches.

Keep tools and a charged hose nearby. Do not leave the pile unattended and do not allow children to monitor your pile for you. You are responsible for everyone’s safety. Once your swamper pile is down, continue to rake and sift the burn pile to ensure everything burns. Once down to minimal embers, you should continue to monitor the fire hourly and periodically turn over the embers with a shovel, and rake out until the fire is completely out and feels cold.

(© Koos Breazeal photo)

Then use your hose set to “spray” and begin around the edges of the pile and work your way in with the hose. Once the smoking is reduced, then you can switch the nozzle to “stream” and fill the burn pit with water. Rake, stir and repeat.

If you feel the fire is getting bigger than you can manage, throw shovels-full of dirt on the edges to snuff the flames.

Continue to rake through the pile for at least one week as fire can sink below the ground and ignite and follow subterranean roots.

Do not attempt to get rid of stumps still in the ground by burning. The fire will follow the roots and continue to burn underground, often up to several weeks.

If you are unsure of your burn pile skill set, consult with your local fire department or fire safe council for advice. You are responsible if your fire leaves its raked perimeter; you can be cited if your fire leaves its perimeter or leaves your property. Burning is an excellent tool for disposing of prunings, but use common sense.
CAN THE FIRE DEPARTMENT FIND YOU?

PRC 4290 and Amador Code 15.30 requires each home to have a reflective address sign at the end of the driveway using 3” numbers. This sign shall face both directions and be clearly visible from the road.

http://www.codepublishing.com/CA/amadorcounty/html/AmadorCounty15/AmadorCounty1530.html

The last thing any of us want is to call 911 and wait. And wait. And wait. Only to have the 911 operator call you back because first responders cannot find your house. Think of the worst-case scenario – your loved one is exhibiting signs of a stroke or heart attack and 3 a.m. in February during a heavy snowstorm; or 9 p.m. in September with heavy smoke conditions.

Assignment. As an experiment, ask a friend to try to find your house in the dark. Will they be able to spot your house number at the road? From both directions?

While the carved wood signs we can purchase at craft shows and county fairs are an artistic statement for forest dwellers, these wood signs can deteriorate or even catch fire during a wildland fire event. Go ahead and keep the carved sign, but on the opposite side of your driveway, install a reflective address sign, as well, using a metal stake.

During the recent fires in Butte County, many residents had to evacuate their homes for extended periods of time. As those neighborhoods reopened to residents, they were escorted in by county employees. Why? Because so much had burned that there were no recognizable landmarks and wood address and street signs were burned. Instead, once they turned onto the street, the county employee would count driveways until they arrived at the specified location. Not a nice welcome home for the evacuees.
Many organizations offer low cost reflective address signs as a fundraiser. Check with your local volunteer fire department or senior center. Alternatively, you can order a reflective address sign online at a reasonable cost.

Often residents have their address sign facing only one direction – the direction most of their company travels. The responding fire engine may be coming from the opposite direction, thus precious time is lost because the engine has to find a place to turn around.

By law, signs must have the address on both sides using 3” numbers. The sign needs to be located within 10 feet of the road edge and your driveway and approximately 4-6 feet up. That is the optimal height to allow headlights from a fire engine or rescue vehicle to light up your address sign, and keeps your house number above the snow.

PREPARE – SURVIVE – RECOVER

PREPARE

A day will likely come when, despite all your preparations and defensible space work, you may be asked to evacuate your home due to wildfire. During drought conditions or a wind event, wildland fires can spot well ahead of the main fire – a quarter of a mile or more. If you have done your preparation work and built a good defensible space, hardened your home and encouraged your neighbors to do the same, you have done as much as you can do. Now is the time to leave and let the first responders do their job. Remember, no home is worth a firefighter’s life, but if you do your part and make your home defendable, efforts can be made to save it.

Curb appeal – think like a realtor. When a large fire occurs (over 100 acres), additional resources are brought in to fight the blaze. It is not uncommon to see hot shot crews from Minnesota, Arizona, Florida, even Alaska, on these large “campaign” fires. While your local volunteer fire department may know your neighborhood very well, consider the disadvantage a crew from Florida might face – different climate, vastly different terrain, and unfamiliar narrow road conditions.

Your next assignment is to gather your neighbors and hop in your car tonight and head out to the highway. Nighttime is a great time for this assignment because it can simulate the poor visibility that comes with smoke.
With fresh eyes, observe as you drive the various routes an out-of-area engine crew may drive to access your neighborhood. Look for street signs – are they well-positioned for optimal viewing or hidden behind tree branches? Once you turn onto your street, observe address signs. Are they easily visible and readable from your vehicle?

As you approach each driveway on your street, stop and take a look up the driveway. Is the house visible from the street, or is the driveway a tunnel of overhanging branches? Is the driveway wide enough to accommodate a wildland fire engine (figure a box 12 feet wide by 14 feet high clearing the driveway). If you have a bridge, will it support the weight of a full water tender engine? If there is a gate, is the gate wide enough? If the gate is locked, is there a Knox box visible and easily located?

A Knox box is a secure, locked box that you affix to a post near your gate. Only fire departments have the key to open the box. Inside the box you can safely store your gate key or combination.

There are never enough engines to defend each and every home in a neighborhood. Ideally, as a wildland fire approaches a neighborhood, a triage team is sent out ahead of the engine crews to reconnoiter the neighborhood and assess which homes have good defensible space and which homes may have to be bypassed. This triage team looks up each driveway and often makes the defendable/not defendable decision at the bottom of the driveway.

You may have the best defensible space in the state, but if your driveway is a tunnel of trees or has an inadequate bridge, you may be passed by. Generally, the triage team will spray-paint a red X at the end of the undefendable driveways. This helps the engine crews to quickly locate the defendable homes.

If on your neighborhood drive-through you find homes that need some extra tweaking on the driveways, organize a neighborhood work day. Many hands can speed the work and build a sense of community.

Assignment: Go Bags. Every family member should have a Go Bag packed and stored in an easily accessed closet or in the garage. Each bag should have 2-3 changes of clothing, spare shoes, a week’s worth of medications, toiletries, several water bottles, and some easily
consumed snacks with high nutritional value. [See the end of this chapter for a complete list].
(courtesy American Red Cross)

When the evacuation call comes, you may be directed to go to a safe “gathering location” first while first responders assess the situation. You may be at the gathering spot for several hours while waiting for the “all clear” call, or you may be asked to continue on to a shelter location. Once the Red Cross shelter is set up, you will find creature comforts like a cot, bedding, showers, and meals, but shelter set up can take several hours. If you have some easily consumed snacks with high nutritional value, you will be better set to cope with the waiting.

Assignment: Important financial records. Once you evacuate, it may be several days to a week or more before you can return home, so you will want to be sure you can access your important financial records while you are away. With a little prior planning, you can reduce one more evacuation worry.

Spend one Saturday going through your papers, locate and scan some of the following: your home deed, home and vehicle insurance documents, bank account information, credit card account information, passwords, contents of your wallet (cards), and medical records. Once scanned, you have several possible options:

- Scan onto 2 disks or thumb drives. Keep one disk in your go bag and send the other disk to a trusted friend or family member outside the area.
- Alternatively, place that spare disk in a bank safe deposit box (cost involved)
- Create a Gmail, Hotmail or Yahoo email account and send all the scanned documents to your email account and let them sit there in a folder until you need to access them. (free email accounts)
- Cloud storage (some cost involved)

When an emergency evacuation occurs, Red Cross and many insurance companies will set up banks of computers at the shelter locations specifically for the use of evacuees. Often local libraries have public computers available, as well. This way, you can begin to recreate your financial life even before you get back home.
Remember your pets. While you are making a Go Bag for your family, make one for your pets. Minimally, dogs and cats should have a collar and leash, a bag of food, a bottle of water, a blanket or towel, and two travel bowls. Each pet should have an ID tag or be micro-chipped. Travel crates provide a quiet place of comfort for your pet, as well as a secure container while in transit.

Horses and other livestock require the same emergency travel kit, just on a larger scale. Halter, lead rope, water bucket and feed are minimum needs. Unless there is no other choice, please do not just open the gates and let the animals run. In a release situation, most livestock will simply run en masse down the nearest road, exposing them to the dangers of being struck by emergency vehicles and also impeding access to the neighborhood by blocking the roadway. In Amador County, we have a trained animal shelter volunteer team that coordinates with Animal Control, the Office of Emergency Services, and Red Cross. See resources at the end of this chapter for a complete guide.

Latch key children, isolated seniors and disabled residents.

Every school day, many parents see their children off to school and then head to their own jobs. When the kids get off the bus in the afternoon, quite often the parents are still at work and kids let themselves into the house. On an ordinary day, these latchkey kids are fine on their own for a couple of hours. However, if you add a wildland fire or other emergency into the mix, these self-sufficient kids are now at risk. Sit down with your children and make a plan today.

More older Californians are staying in their homes as they age or live with disabilities. Sometimes isolated from the larger community, we need to remember these folks as we make our evacuation plans.

Assignment. Host a Saturday morning coffee get-together. Get acquainted with your neighbors and develop a community evacuation plan that includes isolated seniors, disabled residents, latchkey children and everyone’s pets. Figure out who in the neighborhood may need some extra time to evacuate; who will pick up school children if Mom and Dad are still at work; who can help retrieve family pets.
This is a good time to develop a neighborhood Phone Tree. [Contact the Amador Fire Safe Council for help and look at the resources at the end of this chapter.] Divide the neighborhood into 3 or 4 “branches” with one person to head each branch. Appoint two people to share the role of phone tree leader – that way you will have back up if someone is sick or out of town. List names, primary and alternate phone numbers. Twice a year, practice calling the phone tree.

**Follow the weather; get a scanner.** Get acquainted with weather patterns in your area during fire season. Be aware of Red Flag days, wind events, and get to know your seasonal humidity numbers. Each morning on the scanner, Camino or your local fire dispatch will give the morning weather outlook. Learn the terms. You can install your own mini weather station or find the nearest personal weather station on websites such as the Amador Fire Safe Council or Weather Underground. [See resources] By listening to the scanner, you will become acquainted with the fire stations, engine and response vehicle numbers in your area. Pretty soon, you will start to recognize our voices as we respond to emergency calls.

**SURVIVE**

**Leave early.** If fire is coming your way, do not wait for someone to advise you to leave. There may not be time for door-to-door notification. Leave early and be one less household for first responders to worry about. Head for town and hang out. Listen for radio updates on KVGC, 1340 AM or KFBK 1530 AM. Take your handheld scanner and you can follow the dispatches.

**Fire is coming, time to leave.** You knock on the door from the Sheriff. from the northeast. Please leave for the XYZ parking lot on Highway there with more information.“

First, take a deep breath and know that you have prepared for this possibility. If you present a calm demeanor to your family, they will be calm.

Gather your family and pets, load Go Bags in the car. Knowing that it is fire season, you always keep a full tank of gas, park your car facing out, and keep the keys in the vehicle or on a hook by the door.

**Prep the house.** If you have time, prep the house before you leave. Turn on the interior lights (helps fire crews find your house in heavy smoke); close windows and all doors; close heavy drapes; remove lace-type drapes and place in a closet or bathroom. Gather your important
papers, financial documents. Close but do not lock the front door; leave driveway gate open. If you have a tall enough ladder, place it upright against the side of the house.

If you have 10 more minutes, go outside and take down patio umbrellas, take up foot scraper mats, patio chairs and furniture, and wood piles and either drag at least 100 feet from the house or place in an enclosed garage. When a fire is approaching, it may send out firebrands or embers ¼ mile ahead. Patio umbrellas and similar items that can capture embers, which could then catch and burn up to several hours after the fire passes. Once the fire arrives at your home, it generally will move through in 3 – 10 minutes. Most houses can withstand that amount of burn time with minimal damage, so your goal is to remove these items that can hold the embers that could ignite several hours later.

(photo Keith Breazeal, 2013)

Evacuation Routes. If you have not been given an evacuation route, take note of the wind direction. Look for smoke, ash and blowing embers. Travel away from the fire; stay out of canyons or back roads and attempt to get to the highway or a well-traveled road as quickly as possible. Keep windows rolled up; close air vents and run interior air. Put your headlights on; drive slowly and be alert for falling trees, animals, pedestrians, and emergency vehicles entering the community.

Emergency Shelter Locations. There are a number of emergency gathering spots and shelter locations designated throughout the county, often utilizing schools or churches. Please don’t assume you know which shelter will be opened and head that way – you may be heading directly into the fire. Instead, contact emergency officials for the shelter location.

Every effort will be made to house your pets very close by. Quite often, the fairgrounds will be the shelter location, unless the fire is near the fairgrounds. Agreements between the Red Cross and fire agencies will usually allow co-housing.

Assignment. Have a family drill and time to see how long it takes to get Go Bags and pets into the vehicle. Time to see how quickly you can prep the house. Develop several different ways to get out to a main road or highway. Stay out of canyons.

Assignment - Help your neighborhood prepare. Think: Safety in numbers. Come together as a community and help each other prepare by using our simple template to create a neighborhood phone tree. See the Resources Section in the appendix.
RECOVERY

You can begin the recovery process while you are still evacuated from home, if you have access to your financial and insurance records. As soon as you can access a telephone, begin by calling your homeowner insurance company and get paperwork started. If once you get back to your home you find there is no damage, it is easy enough to stop the claim, but you can save yourself valuable time if you at least initiate the process.

The Red Cross will also have staff on hand to help you with temporary housing, food, and additional clothing.

(photos courtesy Keith J. Breazeal, Sunset Court Fire, 2009)
RESOURCES

- Amador Fire Safe Council, neighborhood evacuation guides, weather links, emergency links, community wildfire protection plans and more, 209-295-6200  www.amadorfiresafe.org
- CALFIRE, your state forestry and fire protection agency  http://www.fire.ca.gov/
- American Red Cross disaster preparedness  http://www.redcross.org/prepare/disaster
- Fire resistant landscaping plants for mid-range elevations (Pioneer, Grizzly Flat)  http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu/files/88246.pdf
- Fire resistant landscaping plants for low/mid-range elevations (Sierra Springs, Pine Grove, Pioneer)  http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu/files/88245.pdf
- Neighborhood Phone Tree Template, see AFSC website at  www.amadorfiresafe.org
- Weather Underground  http://www.wunderground.com/
- Animal sheltering – Amador County Animal Control  http://www.amadorgov.org/departments/animal-control
- Amador County Animal Response Team, volunteers coordinated by AC Animal Control  http://www.amadoranimalresponse.org/
- Steve Quarles, Combustibility of Landscape Mulches