

# On The Alert!

**Date:** June 10, 2019  
**Attention:** ASCIP Members  
**Affected Department(s):** Risk Management, Admin, Teachers, & Staff  
**Applicability:** K-12, Charter Schools, & Community College

## WILDFIRES AND DISTRICT RISK

Wildfires are increasing in both frequency and intensity in California. The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection has [prepared maps](#) showing places where wildfires are likely to be extreme due to factors including vegetation and topography.

All districts should consider their wildfire risks, but *especially* those districts located within the high fire hazard severity zone. There are approximately 200 cities that have been designated as [very high fire hazard severity zones](#).

In order to prepare for wildfires and their consequences, following is an outline for wildfire risk management:



Aftermath of Paradise, California wildfire, Nov. 2018

### 1. Mitigating Risk – What to do before a Wildfire.

Impacts of wildfire risk can be mitigated by:

- a. understanding the district's fire hazard severity zone rating. This rating can be obtained from local building or fire officials and is based on the property's fire history, the plants, landscaping, slope and other terrain features that could impact the growth and spread of fire,
- b. creating and maintaining a minimum of 30 ft. of defensible space around structures,
- c. minimizing the flammable footprint around the property through responsible landscaping and water management by
  - i. adhering to all local fire and building codes and weed abatement ordinances,
  - ii. keeping lawns hydrated and maintained,
  - iii. removing dry grass and shrubs to reduce fire intensity,
  - iv. using fire-resistant landscaping when possible,
  - v. creating horizontal and vertical defensible spacing by trimming trees and shrub limbs close to power lines and other structures, removing all tree branches that are at least 8 feet from the ground, and removing dead or dying tree branches.
- d. keeping roof surfaces and rain gutters clear of leaves and debris at all times,
- e. maintaining classrooms, common areas, and assembly areas in accordance with fire life safety codes:
  - i. Seating arrangement should facilitate for quick evacuation if needed. Artwork, decorative materials and other material on the wall shall not exceed 50% of the wall area in a building that is protected by automatic sprinkler system as per the [California State Fire Marshall Information Bulletin – Requirements for Artwork in Group E Occupancies](#).

*Please contact your ASCIP risk services consultant at (562) 404-8029 to discuss further.*

- ii. Curtains, draperies, fabric hangings and other similar combustible decorative materials shall be flame resistant and shall not exceed 10% of the specific wall area to which they are attached.
- iii. Curtains and drapes should be flame-proof with a California State Fire Marshal tag.
- iv. The ceilings should be free of artwork, teaching or decorative material.
- v. All upholstered furniture should meet the flammability requirements of [CA Technical Bulletin \(TB\) 117 Standards](#).
- vi. All combustible dust should be cleaned up regularly by an approved means.
- vii. Store flammable liquids in approved flammable liquid cabinets with self-closing doors.
- viii. Store oil/paint rags in metal containers with a self-closing and tight-fitting lids.
- f. maintaining walkways, evacuation routes, and exits clear of obstructions,
- g. using fire-resistant building materials when building, renovating or retrofitting structures,
- h. maintaining roofs by replacing or repairing loose and missing shingles or roof tiles to prevent embers from entering the roof,
- i. covering exterior vents with metal wire mesh no larger than 1/8 inch to prevent sparks from entering,
- j. preparing for, training, and keeping emergency preparedness and evacuation procedures current,
- k. creating a post-fire heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) maintenance response program.

## 2. What to do during a wildfire.

Once the district has been notified of a wildfire in the area the following steps are recommended:

- a. Notify ASCIP
- b. Visit <https://airnow.gov> to obtain real-time, local air quality conditions. If air quality becomes unsafe or if local regulatory monitoring indicates high levels of particulate matter in the air, keep students indoors.
- c. To prevent smoke from entering the buildings
  - i. Keep all windows and doors closed.
  - ii. When evacuating the buildings, turn off the air conditioning/air circulation systems.

## 3. What to do immediately after a wildfire.

When returning to district sites to evaluate the damage the following steps are recommended:

- a. Notify ASCIP
- b. **Do not** enter district property until authorities have authorized entry.
- c. **Do not** turn on any gas fixtures, water faucets, or any electrical powered items, including lights, until it has been deemed safe by either the fire department or other authorities.
- d. When entering the property avoid hot ash, charred trees, smoldering debris, and live embers. The ground may contain heat pockets that can burn you or spark creating another fire.
- e. Wear a NIOSH certified-respirator or dust mask as applicable. All individuals wearing a NIOSH certified-respirator must be appropriately trained.
- f. Wet the debris to minimize dust particles in the air.
- g. Conduct an inventory and document property damage with photographs.
- h. Implement post-fire heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) maintenance program to ventilate rooms/ buildings in accordance with the manufacturer recommendations.

**Please contact your ASCIP's risk services consultant at (562) 404-5642 to discuss further.**