

How To Survive A Wildfire

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A wildfire is an uncontrolled fire often occurring in wild land areas, but they can also consume houses and agricultural resources.

Wildfires can be life-threatening, especially if you are caught in the fire while trapped in a vehicle and you panic.

How to Survive a Wildfire When Trapped in a Vehicle

You must avoid being caught in a vehicle because a car offers no protection from radiant heat. Think of how fast a covered pot of water reaches a boil, and you will have some idea about why cars are not a safe place to be during a fire.

It is to be used only in emergency if you are caught in the fire with absolutely no other alternative. While it may be safer than trying to out run the fire on foot, the risk is still very high that you will be badly burned or killed inside the vehicle. If it is a grass fire you might be ok, but if it is an infernal like fire, your chances of survival are slim at the best.



No "Wall" Can Keep It From Spreading!

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If you must flee from the fire from your home or place of work use that time to be ahead of the fire so that you won't be caught by it while driving. If it all possible make the decision to stay or leave well in advance of being forced to make the choice.

If you can shelter in your home or a building, it is better to do that than staying in your car.

If you have no choice but to remain with your car during a fire front, do the following in order to survive:

- Roll up all of the car windows and close all the air vents.
- Put the air conditioning on re-circulation.
- Leave the engine running even when you stop.

- Don't worry about the gas tank. Vehicles with metal gas tank rarely explode. You are much safer staying inside the car that you would be on foot if the fire is that bad.

If your vehicle is still capable of moving, then drive very slowly and very carefully.

- Keep your headlights and hazard lights on since visibility will be considerably reduced.
- Watch out for other vehicles and pedestrians. Collisions and injuries are a major hazard in low visibility. People may be panicking and possibly running onto the road.
- You must also watch for fleeing livestock and wildlife.
- Do not be afraid to use your horn if you are worried that people or animals are nearby, but you cannot see them.
- Do not drive through heavy smoke. If the smoke is too thick to see where you are going it may be safer to park and wait out the fire.
- Keep the radio on so that you know what direction the fire is heading and where it is focused. Use a compass and other navigation aides so that you can get out of the fire as quickly as possible.

When you stop driving park behind a solid structure if possible. This will help to block radiant heat, which is the killer heat. If you cannot find a solid structure to take the heat, then stop your car in a clear area beside the road or in a similar suitable place.

Be sure that you are nowhere near overhanging trees and branches, near other combustible materials that might catch fire, or anything else that will burn fiercely.

You must get down on the floor as low as possible. Cover up with a woolen blanket or a coat. Under no circumstances do you use synthetic materials because they will melt and cause severe burns. Cover children and reassure them before covering yourself. If you have water, drink it now. If you have enough water to spare pour a little water on a small cloth to breathe through.

If you have only a vehicle to shelter in:

- When the wildfire front is crossing, do not panic. You must resist the temptation to get out and make a run for it.
- Be prepared for the possibility that your car could stall and not restart.
- Hot air currents may violently rock your car.
- Expect smoke and sparks to enter your vehicle.
- The temperature inside your car will increase quickly. This temperature increase may be unbearable and you or others in the car may be at risk of passing out.
- To help diminish the fear of others in the vehicle you must keep reassuring them that all will be alright soon. Because of the wildfires noise, it may be hard for others within the vehicle to hear you clearly.
- You must remember that everybody in the car will be scared, and some may go into panic. If anyone panics you will need to calm them down quickly and help them resist the temptation to break out of the car and run for their life.

Even SWAT Teams Are Helpless Against This

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Once the fire has passed it is time to get out of the car.

- Immediately attend to children and anyone experiencing stress or shock.
- If you have a cell phone call for help immediately.
- If the car is still operational then drive away from the fire to safety. If the car is no longer operational walk away from the fire and seek help.
- As you walk to safety keep well clear of any burning trees which can drop branches and injure or possibly kill you if they hit you.
- When you leave your vehicle and there's nobody around, be sure to leave a note visible in your vehicle telling whomever finds it that you're alright and which direction you went.

How to Survive a Wildfire on Foot

The most important thing to remember on how to survive a wildfire on foot is to remain calm. This situation is extremely dangerous, but panicking will only hinder your ability to adapt to the situation and survive.

To help keep you calm, breathing techniques are an excellent way to keep your cool. Take a deep breath in for 4 seconds. Then exhale slowly for 4 seconds. Continue to repeat this breathing exercise until you feel more calm and in control.

However, if the air is already smokey you should not take deep breaths. You must remain confident in your ability to [escape and survive](#) because your mental condition is a key factor in determining if you will make it through the fire alive or not.

Protecting your airways is the most important thing that you can do to ensure your safety. Even if the fire continues to advance, you still have a chance of escaping if you can breathe. As soon as you begin to inhale smoke and carbon monoxide, there is a strong chance of you passing out and dying. To get the best air, try to stay as low to the ground as possible. Remember to cover your nose and mouth with a wet cloth and hold it there until you get to a safer area.

If you have time you must determine three courses of action. If time and your mental condition allow it, try to formulate three [different escape plans](#). Then you can quickly assess each of your options to find the best escape route possible. In the event the situation changes you will need to adjust your plans and you will have two backup plans at your disposal.

Note that the most dangerous places to be in relation to the fire are uphill from the flames and downwind from the fire. Always try to stay upwind of the fire at all times.

It is very important to use the wind as your guide. If the wind is blowing past you and towards the fire then run into the wind. If the wind is behind the fire and blowing towards you run perpendicular to the fire so that you are escaping both the actual flames and the course they will blow towards. The

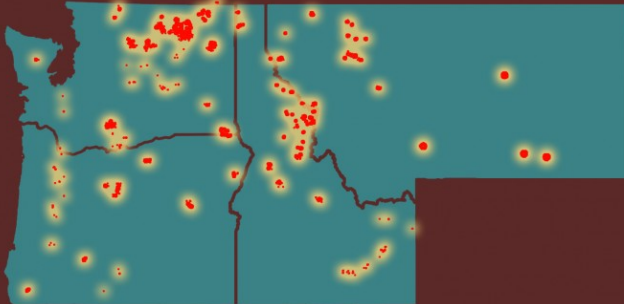
winds can carry sparks and start many new fires up to one mile ahead of the existing flames. Never allow yourself to become surrounded by fire.

Always head for non-flammable terrain. If it is possible head for the nearest, biggest area that is unlikely to burn. While the fire is probably very large, feeding it still requires combustible materials like trees, brush, and tall grass to burn. Look for nearby areas that are free of trees and brush. If at all possible, try to put a body of water between you and the fire.

Places which have already burned are sometimes the safest places to go. If you go to burned over areas, you should ensure that this area is completely extinguished before proceeding. In these areas, lingering fires can still cause burns and breathing problems.

WILDFIRES IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Locations of Active Wildfires



Statistics by State



31 fires over
379,388 acres



18 fires over
497,907 acres



30 fires over
992,905 acres



29 fires over
1,077,162 acres

Forbes



Places to Avoid When Escaping a Wildfire

- Always avoid hills and other elevated burning areas that could leave you trapped once the fire advances.
- You must also avoid areas that are choked with a lot of vegetation, because these areas will almost certainly burn.
- Stay away from canyons, natural chimneys, and ridges. These areas can have very few options if the fire suddenly spreads around you. A canyon could leave you trapped in a dead end.

If the fire surrounds you or if there is no safe place to head to, your safest option is to take refuge in an area that will not burn. An example of this are deep underground caves. If you are able to continue fleeing the fire and heading towards safety you should do so.

If you are near a body of water like a river or a pond seek safety in the water or use it to keep some distance between you and the fire. Fire will not burn across the water unless it is a narrow creek with a lot of overhanging trees.

If you are near a road or ditch but cannot follow the road safely due to the width of the fire, you may be safer using the road as a barrier. The fire will still take time to spread across the pavement even if there are overhanging branches. If you become trapped, lie face down on the pavement as far from the fire as you can get. If there is a ditch on the far side of the road, get in the ditch face down.

If you must stand your ground, try to cover your body with anything that will protect you from the fire. Wet clothing or a wet blanket are very useful. When all else fails cover yourself as much as possible with dirt or mud. This may help to keep you cooler, and hopefully keep your clothes below the kindling point.

No matter what, you must lay down and stay covered until the fire passes. Failure to do this could get you killed. When the fire has passed, you must check over the others in your group for injuries and also check yourself. Next, call for help if anyone is injured. If no one is injured, call friends and family to let them know the situation.

In conclusion wildfires are one of the most dangerous forces of nature. They can come out of nowhere at high speed and overtake acres of land in just minutes. The most important thing you can do to protect yourself against wildfires is to have a wildfire plan. This plan should cover all aspects of what to do, how to do it, and just as important, what not to do.

Your wildfire plan should be tested at least 2 times a year to verify that all things are covered and that it works. Also your plan should be checked over by your emergency services in the city or county that you live in. If at all possible you should have these emergency service personnel come and evaluate one of your wildfire drills to see if there is anything else that needs to be covered.



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