



RISK ALERT

August 10, 2023

TCRMF Risk Alert

Wildfires

Recent declarations of “critical fire danger” and red flag warnings are valuable alerts from the National Weather Service that wind, humidity, and drought conditions can result in uncontrollable wildfires anywhere in Texas. We readily think of forest fires like the 25,000- acre fire near Bastrop in 2011 that destroyed almost 2,000 homes and killed two people. To be better prepared, we need to expand that awareness to encompass wildfires in the Hill Country, the Panhandle, North Texas, or wherever conditions are ripe.

In early 2022, wildfires just south of Interstate 20 destroyed thousands of acres of farm and ranch land, forced the evacuation of four towns, left one town totally wiped out by fire, and killed a Sheriff’s Deputy trying to help people escape. Luckily, this Eastland Complex fire was eventually contained by low winds, higher humidity, some rare rain, and the efforts of hundreds of fire fighters and their land and airborne resources. A grass fire near Dallas in July also reached several homes in a subdivision and destroyed six homes and damaged several others.

Now the dog days of Summer in 2023 are showing the same threats; winds at 15+ mph, low humidity, and drought conditions. As of the writing of this bulletin, 173 Texas Counties are under [Burn Bans](#) and there are eleven active wildfires throughout the state with varying levels of containment:

- Mesquite Flats Fire, Hays County - 15 acres, 90% contained.
- Parmer Lane Fire, Williamson County - 50 acres, 60% contained.
- Tomlinson Lake Fire, Falls County - 30 acres, 95% contained.
- Haunted Hill Fire, McLennan County - 205 acres, 95% contained.

- Craft Fire, Jack County - 500 acres, 20% contained.
- North Dykes Fire, King County - 7 acres, 0% contained.
- Kirby Creek Fire, Lampasas County - 78 acres, 95% contained.
- Jennings Fire, Zapata County - 3,000 acres, 95% contained.
- Double Back Fire, Johnson County - 1,400 acres, 75% contained.
- Lucy Creek Fire, Lampasas County - 51 acres, 90% contained.
- Oak Grove Fire, Hays County - 400 acres, 95% contained.

The Texas A&M Forest Service responds to wildfires and helps marshal the people and equipment to fight the fires. They can bring heavy equipment, like bull dozers, large and small planes, and helicopters. Large jet aircraft also drop water and fire retardants. In most cases, the first responders to a wildfire are usually the local volunteers and community fire departments. During the Eastland Complex fire, those local responses were soon overwhelmed by the passage of a cold front and high winds that spread the fire along its front, and with the spread of flying embers that advanced the fire at thousand yard or mile wide jumps. The Forest Service called on the Texas Intrastate Fire Mutual Aid System to respond. These resources and rain eventually contained the fire after it had burned 54,513 acres.

How can these wildfires be prevented? In about 10% of cases, lightning is the cause but in about 90% of cases human activity starts the fire. That is why we see "Burn Ban in Effect" signs in communities and hear about Red Flag Warnings declared by the National Weather Service. Outside burning can easily escape and overcome a person using a garden hose or rake and spread quickly out of control. Vehicles with catalytic converters parked over dry grass can start fires. Cigarette butts can start fires. Firecrackers and bottle rockets can start fires. Campfires and outside incinerators all contribute. Any campfire should be completely extinguished using water and stirring the embers before leaving a campsite. When critical fire weather is forecast, avoid any outside ignition sources.

What can be done to protect homes and buildings? The National Forest Service and the National Fire Protection Association recommend "defensible space" around a home or building. They recommend:

- Removal of trees and other vegetation near the building, especially tree branches that extend over a roof. Tree canopy should be at least 10 feet from the roof. Tree canopies should be at least six to ten feet above the ground.
- Keep combustible fuels like dry leaves or pine needles away from trees that can carry fire into the canopy.
- Keep gutters and roof valleys clear of dead leaves and other litter that can be ignited by heat or flying embers.
- Eliminate a "fuse" of combustible material that comes from the interface with the wildfire source to the dwelling or building.
- Stacks of firewood should be away from the structure or propane tanks.
- Landscaping around the foundation of the structure should be minimal or include rock, grass, or evergreen groundcover to help slow the spread of fire.

- Open areas beneath decks should be enclosed with wire screening to prevent the accumulation of combustible material.
- Attic vents, soffit, or eave vents should be screened to prevent entry of embers into an attic.
- Repair any broken windows or screens that can allow burning embers into the building.
- Inspect the roof and repair or replace missing shingles. Flat roofs can also accumulate combustible debris around drains, roof mounted equipment, and parapets.
- Keep lawn areas watered and closely mowed and remove clippings and other yard debris.
- Create a wildfire evacuation plan. You can use many parts of your emergency weather plans, adapted for wildfires. Hurricanes and other weather-related emergencies will often have much more planning time. Wildfires change moment to moment, moving at incredible speed, and can even create their own internal weather systems.
- Practice evacuation drills during fire season. Many people have lost their lives trying to retrieve belongings or protect their property. Employees need to have a consistent message regarding evacuation.

More information about defensible space is available at nfpa.org. Another resource for information about the location and status of wildfires is a website that locates all active fires in the United States and gives information about location, size, containment, and resources working the fire. The website is at inciweb.nwcg.gov. If you smell smoke in the air, it's time to check for a fire nearby.

The Fund can help you with identifying wildfire risks and developing plans for evacuation. For more information, contact Jeremy Wade, Loss Control Manager at jeremy.wade@sedgwick.com.

Use the links below for more information and tools

[Recent Member Communications](#)

[Workers' Compensation Forms](#)

[Liability and Property Loss Notices](#)

[Fund Contact List](#)

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