



Becoming a Recognized FireSmart® Community



Living with Wildfire

Whether you've lived in the wildland/urban interface for years, or are purchasing or renting your dream home away from the hectic pace of city life, you may be concerned about wildfire. Living in forested or agricultural areas where wildfires can occur poses a risk to your property and loved ones — but it is possible to live compatibly with this natural event. Read on to learn more about how your participation in the FireSmart Canada Community Recognition Program can make you and your home safer.

What is the FireSmart Canada Community Recognition Program?

This Program is designed to encourage local, self-organized groups of neighbours to implement solutions for wildfire safety by engaging and supporting homeowners, community leaders, and others in shared efforts to protect people and property from wildfire. Citizen involvement is the cornerstone of the FireSmart Canada Community Recognition Program (FireSmart Communities Program). If you are a homeowner or community resident whose home is located in a region susceptible to wildfires, this brochure will offer you relevant information on how you can help your community to become FireSmart. As participants in the program, you and your neighbours will learn how to decrease the risk of losing your homes and how to best protect yourselves in the event of wildfire.

Wildfire strikes fast! When it spreads into urban areas (the wildland/urban interface) not every home can be attended or defended by firefighters. However, communities whose residents take steps to reduce their vulnerability have a greater chance of surviving a wildfire. The FireSmart Communities Program offers residents in fire-prone areas a unique opportunity to implement FireSmart practices specially tailored to individual and community needs.



You and your neighbours will gain useful knowledge and skills to prepare for a wildfire before it occurs. FireSmart homes and neighbourhoods allow fire fighters to concentrate on fighting the wildfire – which ultimately saves more homes and lives. What’s more, even a few preventive actions can prove critical, because when adequately prepared, homes have often survived a wildfire without the intervention of the fire department.

The Program draws on a community’s spirit, its resolve, and its willingness to take responsibility for reducing wildfire risks by providing measures needed to achieve both a high level of protection against wildland/urban interface fire and ecosystem balance. The Program utilizes the following three-legged template:

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- ▶ Where higher wildfire hazard levels are assessed within a community or upon a request to FireSmart Canada, a Local FireSmart Representative will contact your community spokesperson to provide information about living with wildfire including risk mitigation information tailored to your specific community or region.
 - ▶ With the assistance of the Local FireSmart Representative, you and your neighbours form a cooperating network to assess the wildfire hazards around you.
 - ▶ You and your neighbours identify and implement local solutions.

How Can My Community Become A Recognized FireSmart Community?

Ultimately, it all begins with you. Becoming FireSmart takes time and coordination with your neighbours and others, but getting started is actually quite straightforward. The FireSmart Communities Program offers flexibility in creating the most appropriate plan and actions for your community. You will find that the effort expended reaps many rewards.

Following these steps, your community will be on its way toward becoming FireSmart.

1. Contact FireSmart Canada

A community representative (you or another interested member of your community) phones FireSmart Canada at 780-435-7338 or completes an on-line request for contact by the Local FireSmart Representative on the FireSmart Canada website, www.firesmartcanada.ca

2. Site Visit

At an agreed-upon time, your Local FireSmart Representative, a specialist in wildland/urban interface (WUI) fire, will visit your area and assess wildfire hazards. The visit is coordinated with you and local fire officials.

3. Community Representation

At the same time, your Community Champion (again, this could be you) recruits others from your community to create a FireSmart Community Board. Aside from other homeowners, this group could include fire professionals, land managers, planners and members of other interest groups. Work together to create your own FireSmart Community Plan – be aware this may take up to six months.

4. Assessment & Evaluation

Upon completing a wildfire hazard assessment and evaluation of the community's wildfire readiness, the Local FireSmart Representative schedules a meeting with your local FireSmart Board to present the assessment for review and acceptance by the Board. If accepted, the process continues; if not, it is terminated.

5. Moving Forward/Creating A Plan

Your local FireSmart Board develops area-specific solutions to its WUI fire issues based on the Local FireSmart Representative's report. All members of the FireSmart Board must concur with the final plan. The FireSmart Plan is presented to and approved by your provincial/territorial FireSmart Liaison. The Local FireSmart Representative may work with your community to seek project implementation funds, if needed.

6. Implement Solutions

Solutions from your FireSmart Community Plan are implemented following a schedule designed by your FireSmart Board, who will be responsible for maintaining the program into the future.

7. Apply for Recognition

FireSmart Community recognition status is achieved after your community submits its application form along with a completed FireSmart Community Plan and FireSmart Event documentation to your Local FireSmart Representative. See the application form at: www.firesmartcanada.ca.

8. **Renewing Your Recognition Status**

Annual renewal of your recognition is completed by submitting documentation of your community's continued participation to the provincial/territorial FireSmart Liaison. This can be easily accomplished with the on-line form available from:

www.firesmartcanada.ca

What are the Recognition Criteria?

Neighbourhoods, subdivisions, and small towns in areas of Canada prone to wildfire can earn FireSmart Community recognition status by creating dedicated local FireSmart Boards and by implementing FireSmart principles tailored to their specific community needs. This nationwide initiative by Partners in Protection recognizes communities for taking action to protect people and properties from the risk of fire in the wildland/urban interface. Communities and neighbourhoods create their programs themselves with cooperative assistance from trained Local FireSmart Representatives.

Wildfire prone communities earn FireSmart Community recognition status by meeting the following criteria:

- ▶ Enlisting a wildland/urban interface specialist to complete an assessment and create a plan that identifies locally agreed-upon solutions that the community can implement.
- ▶ Sponsoring a local FireSmart Board which maintains the FireSmart Community Plan and tracks its progress or status.
- ▶ Conducting FireSmart Events each year that are dedicated to a local FireSmart project.
- ▶ Investing a minimum of \$2.00 annually per capita in local FireSmart Community efforts. This is surprisingly easy to do since volunteer time is credited at \$21 per hour (2013 amount).
- ▶ If your community has a headstart on FireSmart already, and can document your efforts, this can also be recognized.
- ▶ Submitting an annual report to FireSmart Canada documenting continuing compliance with the program.

What is the Ignition Zone and Why is it so Important?



The ignition zone is the key to preparing your home for wildfire readiness. Your ignition zone – including the condition of the house and its immediate surroundings within 30 to 100 metres and other structures such as garages, decks, porches, or fences that come in contact with the house – is what determines your home's susceptibility to ignition during a wildfire. The more you can eliminate the things that can lead a wildfire to your home, the more

likely your home will survive. Here are some simple steps for evaluating your ignition zone and making it a deterrent to the progress of the fire:

- ▶ Clear the build-up of pine needles and leaves from the base of the house and any connecting structures which could otherwise ignite the home's siding.
- ▶ Create a three-metre, fire-free (i.e. non-combustible) area on all sides of your home.
- ▶ Clear trees and shrubs of dead material and keep them pruned. Space trees and shrubs far enough apart to slow the spread of an approaching wildfire.
- ▶ Choose deciduous trees and shrubs, rather than evergreens for planting close to your home. Evergreens burn fiercely. Plants that shed leaves annually burn more slowly.
- ▶ Regularly care for your property to keep it free of dead leaves, needles and debris.
- ▶ Plant native wildflowers and fire-resistant plants; keep lawns trimmed and irrigated as they serve as good fire breaks, as do rock gardens and xeriscapes.

- ▶ Remember that wide driveways, non-flammable walkways and other pathways can slow or stop the spread of a wildfire.
- ▶ Use metal flashing at all connection points of structures, such as wooden fences attached to the house.
- ▶ “Limb-up” trees around the house by removing lower limbs that are within 2.5 metres of the ground.
- ▶ Trim any limbs on trees hanging over the house.
- ▶ Store firewood well away from your house, particularly during fire-season.
- ▶ Use non-flammable (Class A) roofing materials.
- ▶ Clear gutters of leaves and debris.
- ▶ Ensure that chimneys for all wood burning appliances are screened to prevent escape of live embers.
- ▶ Remove excess vegetation along roads.

The nationwide FireSmart Communities Program is a core component of the larger FireSmart Canada Initiative which is led by the non-profit organization called Partners in Protection, originators of the FireSmart concept.

The FireSmart Canada Initiative is supported by contributions from various provincial and territorial wildland fire agencies, the National Fire Protection Association, the Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction, and private donors. Partners in Protection continues to seek additional support in order to maintain and expand programs that encourage and enable people of the wildland/urban interface to work together to reduce the risk of wildfire losses.

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For more information, visit www.firesmartcanada.ca

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What are the Benefits of Being a FireSmart Community?

While the benefits can vary, there are a number of positive outcomes experienced by communities that become members of the FireSmart Communities Program. Being “FireSmart”:

- ▶ Creates defensible space that prevents fires from advancing and endangering homes and lives.
- ▶ Reduces the probability that wind-driven embers falling far ahead of a wildfire will ignite a fire on or around your home.
- ▶ Improves property value while reducing risk of loss.
- ▶ Improves community relationships with local fire staff, since firefighters can concentrate their efforts on fighting wildfires rather than devoting often limited resources to protecting homes – which may ultimately be lost if the fire can’t be contained.
- ▶ Encourages good neighbours, since the more homes within a community that adopt “FireSmart” practices, the greater the impact on reducing the heat and speed of the fire.
- ▶ Offers peace of mind, knowing that your home is prepared to survive a wildfire in the event one should occur.



For more information on the FireSmart Communities Program...

Visit www.firesmartcanada.ca or phone 780-435-7338.

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