

# READY, SET, GO!

Montana

YOUR PERSONAL WILDLAND FIRE ACTION GUIDE



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## Montana Wildland Fire Action Guide

Saving Lives and Property  
through Advanced Planning



**F**ire season is now a year-round reality in many areas, requiring firefighters and residents to be on heightened alert for the threat of wildland fire. This plan is designed to help you get ready, get set, and go when a wildland fire approaches. Civilian deaths occur because people wait too long to leave their home.

Each year, wildland fires consume hundreds of homes in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI). Studies show that as many as 80 percent of the homes lost to wildland fires could have been saved if their owners had only followed a few simple fire-safe practices.

Montana wildland firefighting agencies and your local fire department take every precaution to help protect you and your property from wildland fire. However, the reality is that in a major wildland fire event, there will simply not be enough fire resources or firefighters to defend every home.

Successfully preparing for a wildland fire enables you to take personal responsibility for protecting yourself, your family and your property. In this Ready, Set, Go! Action Guide, our goal is to provide you with the tips and tools you need to prepare for a wildland fire threat, to have situational awareness when a fire starts, and to leave early when a wildland fire threatens, even if you have not received a warning.

The Ready, Set, Go! Program works in a collaborative fashion to compliment Fire Adapted Communities, FireSafe Montana, Firewise® Communities Program, and other existing wildland fire public education efforts.

Fire is, and always has been, a natural occurrence in Montana. Historically, our forested areas and rangelands burned periodically long before we built homes there. Wildland fires are fueled by a build-up of dry vegetation and driven by seasonal hot, dry winds. They are also extremely dangerous and difficult to control. Many people have built homes in the Wildland-Urban Interface without fully understanding the impact a fire may have on their lives. Few have adequately prepared their families for timely evacuation in the event of a wildland fire.



It is not a question of **if**, but rather **when**, the next major wildland fire will occur. Through advanced planning, understanding and preparation, we can all be partners in the wildland fire solution. The tips on the following pages are designed to create heightened awareness and a safer environment for you, your family and firefighters.

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# Living in the Wildland-Urban Interface

Ready, Set, Go! begins with a house that can survive on its own.

## Prepare Your Property!

If you live next to a naturally vegetated area, often called the Wildland-Urban Interface, you must prepare your property and modify vegetation around your property. This can be done by altering grasses, shrubs, and trees on your property. Effective preparation reduces the wildland fire threat to your property and is a critical component of a home that can survive without firefighters.



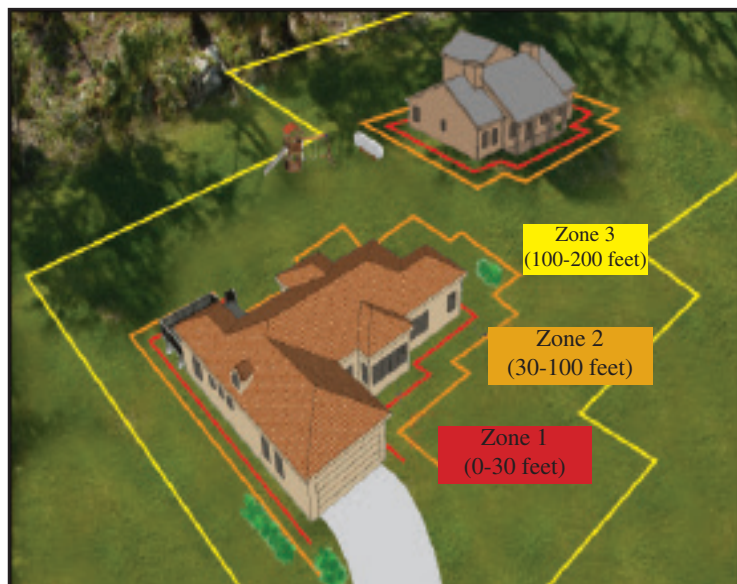
## Even if you do not live in the WUI, you may live in the Ember Zone.

A home within one mile of a naturally vegetated or WUI area is in the Ember Zone. Wind-driven embers can threaten your home. You and your home must be prepared well before a fire occurs. Fires caused by embers can destroy homes or neighborhoods far from the actual front of the wildland fire.

## Living in the Ember Zone

In a wildland fire event, your house may be showered with burning embers. Any flammable materials that could be ignited by the burning embers needs to be eliminated where they come in contact with your house or other buildings. This includes dead pine needles, dry grasses, wood piles, wood chips used for mulching, and even dry coconut husk door mats - anything likely to catch fire and spread to your structure.

# Give Your Home a Chance



The area between your home and an approaching wildland fire where the vegetation has been modified through careful selection, maintenance and some replacement improves the chances of your home surviving with little or no assistance from firefighters.

During a major wildland fire event, firefighting resources will be limited. It is likely there will not be enough to protect every home.

## ZONE ONE

0-30 feet around your home

- Use hard surfaces such as concrete or noncombustible rock mulch 0-5 feet around home.
- Use non-woody, low growing herbaceous vegetation. Succulent plants and ground covers are good choices.
- Store firewood or other combustible materials at least 30 feet away from your home, garage or attached deck.
- Remove branches overhanging or touching the roof to a distance of at least 10 feet.

## ZONE TWO

30-100 feet around your home or to property line

- Thin trees to a minimum of 10 feet between tops of trees or create vegetation groups “islands” to break up continuous fuels.
- Remove ladder fuels, creating a separation between low-level vegetation and tree branches to keep fire from climbing up trees.
- Remove leaf and needle debris from the yard.
- Keep grasses and wildflowers under 8” in height.

## ZONE THREE

100-200 feet around your home or to property line

- Create and maintain a minimum of 10 feet between the tops of trees.
- Remove ladder fuels, creating a separation between low-level vegetation and tree branches to keep fire from climbing up trees.
- Remove dead trees and shrubs.

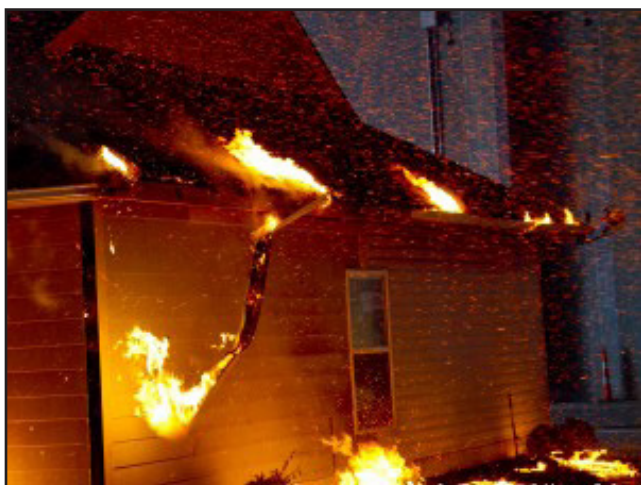
### Ladder Fuels

*Ladder fuels are those that will allow the fire to climb from the surface fuels into the upper portion of the tree. They can be eliminated by increasing horizontal and vertical separation between vegetation.*



# Making a Hardened Home

Suitable construction materials offer a home the best chance to survive a wildland fire. Embers from a wildland fire can find the weak link in your home's fire protection scheme and gain the upper hand due to a small, overlooked or seemingly inconsequential factors. However, there are measures you can take to safeguard your home from wildland fire. While you may not be able to accomplish all the measures listed below, each will decrease the ignitability of your home and increase its chances of survival during a wildland fire.



This photo shows how gutters filled with debris can be ignited by wind-blown embers that land there. Once ignited, the edge of the roof and fascia are exposed to direct flame contact.



No deck, regardless of the material used to build it, would be safe if this amount of fuel beneath the deck caught fire. Even decks that may have a noncombustible surface, such as concrete, use lumber and timbers for structural support and those materials can catch fire.

## ROOFS

The roof is the most vulnerable part of your home. Because of its large horizontal surface, embers can land and ignite combustible materials and debris such as leaves and needles. Clean roof valleys, open ends of barrel tiles, and rain gutters on a regular basis.

## EAVES

Open eave construction is vulnerable to embers and flames. “Boxed-in” or soffited eaves provide better protection.

## VENTS

Embers can enter the attic and other enclosed spaces through vents. Vents with vertical orientation, such as vents in open eave construction or gable end vents, are more susceptible to embers.

## WALLS

Combustible siding and trim is vulnerable to flames from ignited vegetation or debris at the base of walls. Fire can spread vertically to windows and eaves. An effective noncombustible zone close to your home is particularly important if you have combustible siding.

If you live in a mobile home, install skirting made from a noncombustible material (e.g. metal or fiber-cement) around the perimeter.

## WINDOWS AND DOORS

Embers can enter through open windows and through gaps at the edge of garage doors. Plants or combustible materials stored under windows can ignite by embers, resulting in flames breaking window glass and igniting combustible window frames.

## BALCONIES AND DECKS

Embers can collect under balconies and decks, igniting vegetative debris and other combustible materials, including the deck. The flames can then enter the home through walls or broken glass in the window or sliding glass door. Shade coverings for decks should be made from noncombustible materials. Carpeted decks should be avoided.

# Tour a Wildland Fire Ready Home

**Inside:** Keep working fire extinguishers on hand. Install smoke alarms on each level of your home and near bedrooms. Test them monthly and change the batteries twice a year.

**Deck/Patio Cover:** Use heavy timber or nonflammable construction material for decks. Enclose the underside of balconies and decks with fire-resistant materials to prevent embers from blowing underneath. Keep your deck clear of combustible items, such as baskets, flower arrangements and other material. The decking surface must be ignition resistant materials within 10 feet of the home.


**Address:** Make sure your address is clearly visible from the road. Reflective and noncombustible numbering is recommended.

**Roof:** Use a Class A fire-rated roof covering, such as composition shingles, metal or tile, when roofing or re-roofing. Block any spaces between roof decking and covering to minimize ember intrusion. Clear pine needles, leaves and other debris from your roof and gutters. Prune tree branches within 10 feet of your roof.

**Vents:** At a minimum, all vent openings should be covered with 1/8-inch corrosion resistant metal mesh.

**Windows:** Radiant heat from burning vegetation or a nearby structure can cause the glass in windows to break. This will allow embers to enter and start internal fires. Single-pane and large picture windows are particularly vulnerable to glass breakage. Install dual-paned windows with a minimum of one pane being tempered glass to reduce the chance of breakage during a fire. Limit the size and number of windows in your home that face large areas of vegetation.

**Driveways and Access Roads:** Driveways should be designed to allow emergency vehicles and fire equipment to reach your house. Access roads should have a minimum 10 foot clearance on either side of the traveled section of roadway and should allow for two-way traffic. Ensure that all gate openings are wide enough to accommodate emergency equipment. Trim trees and shrubs overhanging the road back to a minimum of 14 feet to allow emergency vehicles access.



**Chimney:** Cover chimney and stovepipe outlets with a noncombustible screen of 1/2-inch wire mesh to reduce the size and energy of embers leaving the chimney. Make sure that tree branches are at least 10 feet away from the chimney.

**Walls:** Wood, vinyl and other plastic siding and trim products are combustible. Consider building or remodeling with ignition-resistant or noncombustible building materials, such as brick, cement, masonry or stucco.

**Home Site and Yard:** Ensure you have 100 feet of managed vegetation around your home or to your property line. This area may need to be enlarged in severe fire hazard areas. This may mean looking past what you own to determine the impact a common slope or neighbor's yard will have on your property during a wildland fire. Remember the importance of routine maintenance. Keep woodpiles, propane tanks and combustible materials away from your home and other structures such as detached garages, barns and sheds. Ensure trees are far away from power lines.

**Eaves:** Box in eaves with a noncombustible or ignition resistant material.

**Gutters:** Screen or cover rain gutters with a flat, noncombustible metal device. If possible, the device should follow the slope of the roof.

**Fencing:** Use noncombustible fencing within 5 feet of your home.

**Water:** Have multiple garden hoses that are long enough to reach any area of your home and other structures on your property. If you have a pool, pond or irrigation ditch, consider a pump.

**Garage:** Install weather stripping around and under the vehicle access door. This will reduce the intrusion of embers. If the garage is attached to the home, install a solid door with self-closing hinges between living areas and garage. Do not store combustibles and flammable liquids near combustion equipment (e.g. hot water heater).

# READY, SET, GO!

## Create Your Own Wildland Fire Action Plan

Now that you've done everything you can to prepare your home, it's time to prepare your family. Your **Wildland Fire Action Plan** should be prepared with all members of your household well in advance of a fire. Use these checklists to help you prepare and gain situational awareness of the threat of wildland fires.

## GET READY | Preparing for the Fire Threat



- Create a **Wildland Fire Action Plan** that includes meeting locations and communication plans. Rehearse it regularly. Also include the evacuation of pets and large animals such as horses.
- Have fire extinguishers on hand and train your family how to use them.
- Ensure that your family is familiar with the location of your gas, electric and water main shut-off controls and how to use them.
- Plan and know several different evacuation routes. Pre-program your GPS device with multiple escape routes, as visibility may be low.
- Designate an emergency meeting location outside the fire hazard area.
- Assemble an emergency supply kit as recommended by the American Red Cross. Keep an extra kit in your vehicle.
- Appoint an out-of-area friend or relative as a point of contact so you can communicate with family members.
- Maintain a list of emergency contact numbers posted near your phone and in your emergency supply kit.

### Resources

- ▶ [www.firesafemt.org](http://www.firesafemt.org)
- ▶ [www.ready.mt.gov](http://www.ready.mt.gov)
- ▶ [www.readyssetgomontana.org](http://www.readyssetgomontana.org)



# GET SET | Situational Awareness when a Fire Starts

- Monitor fire weather conditions and fire status. Stay tuned to your TV or local radio stations for updates or check the appropriate websites.
- Evacuate as soon as you are aware of a possible threat to your home or evacuation route. Do not wait for emergency notification. Alert family members and neighbors.
- Dress in appropriate clothing (i.e. clothing made from natural fibers such as cotton and work boots). Have goggles, gloves, and a dry bandana or particle mask handy.
- Ensure that you have your emergency supply kit on hand.
- Remain close to your house, drink plenty of water and keep an eye on your family and pets until you are ready to leave.
- If you or your family members require more time to leave, it is best to leave immediately and not wait to be notified.

## INSIDE CHECKLIST, if time allows

- Close all windows and doors, leaving doors unlocked.
- Open window shades and curtains and close metal shutters (if installed).
- Move furniture away from windows and doors.
- Turn off pilot lights for gas appliances. Turn off the air conditioning.
- Leave your lights on so firefighters can see your house and other structures under smoky conditions.



## OUTSIDE CHECKLIST, if time allows

- Bring combustible items, such as patio furniture and cushions inside.
- Turn off propane tanks and other gas at the meter.
- If you are on a municipal water system, don't leave sprinklers on or water running - they can reduce water pressure.
- Leave exterior lights on.
- Back your car into the driveway to facilitate a quick departure when ready to evacuate.
- Have a ladder available.
- Cover attic and crawl space vents with pre-cut plywood or commercial covers.

## IF YOU ARE TRAPPED: SURVIVAL TIPS

- Remain inside your home until fire passes. Shelter away from outside walls.
- Bring garden hoses inside house so embers and flames don't destroy them.
- Patrol inside your home and look in your attic for spot or smoldering fires. If found, extinguish them.
- Wear dry long sleeved shirts and long pants made of natural fibers such as cotton.
- Stay hydrated.
- Ensure you can exit the home if it catches fire (remember if it's hot inside the house, it is four to five times hotter outside).
- Fill sinks and tubs for an emergency water supply.
- Place wet towels under doors to keep smoke and embers out.
- After the fire has passed, check around your house and on your roof. Extinguish any small smoldering or burning fires.
- If there are fires that you cannot extinguish with a small amount of water or in a short period of time, call 9-1-1.

# Go – Leave Early

By leaving early, you give your family the best chance of surviving a wildland fire. You also help firefighters by keeping roads clear of congestion, enabling them to move more freely and do their jobs in a safer environment.

## WHEN TO LEAVE

Do not wait to be advised to leave if there is a possible threat to your home or evacuation route. Leave early enough to avoid being caught in fire, smoke or road congestion. If you are advised to leave, don't hesitate!

## WHERE TO GO

Evacuate to a predetermined location. It should be a low-risk area, such as a well-prepared neighbor or relative's house, a Red Cross shelter or evacuation center, motel, etc.

## HOW TO GET THERE

Have several travel routes in case one route is blocked by the fire or by emergency vehicles and equipment. Choose an escape route away from the fire.

## WHAT TO TAKE

Take your emergency supply kit containing your family's and pet's necessary items.



## EMERGENCY SUPPLIES

The American Red Cross recommends every family have an emergency supply kit assembled. Use the checklist below to help assemble yours. For more information on emergency supplies, visit the American Red Cross at [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org).

- Three-day supply of water (one gallon per person per day).
- Non-perishable food for all family members and pets (three-day supply).
- First aid kit.
- Flashlight, battery-powered radio, and extra batteries.
- An extra set of car keys, credit cards, and cash or traveler's checks.
- Sanitation supplies.
- Extra eyeglasses or contact lenses.
- Important family documents and contact numbers.
- Map marked with evacuation routes.
- Prescriptions or special medications.
- Family photos, valuables and other irreplaceable items that are easy to carry.
- Personal computers, hard drives, disks, and flash-drives.
- Chargers for cell phones, laptops, etc.



# READY, SET, GO!

## Create Your Own Wildland Fire Action Plan

# Ranchers and Rural Residents

### PREPARE YOUR ANIMALS

- Create a livestock evacuation plan.
- Ensure proper registering and branding of livestock.
- Establish a contingency plan for feeding livestock if grazing land is destroyed by fire.



# GET READY |

### PREPARE YOUR FAMILY

- Create a **Wildland Fire Action Plan** that includes meeting locations and communication plans and rehearse it regularly. Include in your plan the evacuation of large animals such as horses.
- Plan and know your evacuation routes. Have more than one exit from your headquarters and primary residence.
- Pre-program your GPS device with multiple escape routes, as visibility may be low.
- Assemble an emergency supply kit as recommended by the American Red Cross.
- Appoint an out-of-area friend or relative as a point of contact so you can communicate with family.
- Keep an emergency supply kit in all ranch and personal vehicles.

### PREPARE YOUR PROPERTY

- Establish and maintain firebreaks around pastures and structures.
- Reduce vegetation and remove combustible material around all structures.
- Reinforce fences with metal posts, if applicable.
- Create a safe zone clear of all vegetation for equipment.
- Clear vegetation around fuel tanks and other highly combustible equipment.



# GET SET

## *Situational Awareness when a Fire Starts*

### YOUR PROPERTY

- Hook up your stock trailer and load your animals.
- Unlock and open gates so livestock can escape flames and firefighters can gain access.
- Close all barn doors so horses and livestock will not go into a burning building.
- Move equipment into a safe zone that is clear of combustible fuels.
- Close all doors, windows, and turn on exterior/interior lights in barns and other structures.
- Shut off gas supply and propane tanks.



### YOUR FAMILY

- Be ready to go at a moment's notice.
- Alert family and ranch hands.
- Dress in appropriate clothing (i.e. cotton, work boots, goggles, dry bandana, gloves, Nomex).
- Ensure you and your family have separate emergency kits in case you get separated.
- Monitor the radio or Internet for fire updates.
- Stay hydrated.



### COMMUNICATE WITH FIRE PERSONNEL BEFORE FIRE SEASON BEGINS.

- Contact your wildland firefighting agency or local fire department to coordinate firefighting on your property.
- Keep copies of gate keys and a written list of combinations in a known location.
- If you would like to offer your equipment (water tank, tractor) for firefighting, make arrangements and contracts prior to use for proper tracking and reimbursement.

## LEAVE EARLY

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Evacuate your family, pets, livestock and cherished possessions to a safe area and monitor for fire updates.

If you choose to stay with your property, make sure your family is considered first. Decide who stays and who evacuates (consider children, elderly or ill family members).

Nothing you own is worth your family members' lives.

## IF YOU CHOOSE TO STAY

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Call your local law enforcement.

Have spare gate keys and combination lists ready for responders.

If you have prior contracts for equipment use, be ready to coordinate with fire operations personnel.



## TIPS FOR MONTANA RANCHERS

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**O**ffer knowledge of your area to fire crews. Your knowledge of access roads, location of structures, location of water sources, fence lines and geography of the land can prove helpful to fire crews who may not be familiar with the area.

**C**ommunicate with fire operations. Ask questions, offer assistance, give permission. Chances are if a fire is on your ranch, fire crews will need to be in contact with you. Be patient and understand that there are many moving parts to a fire operation. Sometimes decisions require communication between several stakeholders and may take longer than you are accustomed to.

**D**on't panic or jump to conclusions. Firefighters and ranchers in Montana have the same goals when a wildfire occurs - to protect lives, property and livelihoods. Grazing areas and stored hay can be a costly loss for ranchers. By offering your knowledge and communicating with fire operations, fire crews can run an operation effectively and efficiently while protecting what is important to you.



# READY, SET, GO!

## Property Preparedness

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
1. Has vegetation been removed and modified in the recommended zones around your home?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Are the rain gutters and roof free of leaves, needles and branches?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Are all vent openings screened with 1/8 inch mesh metal screen?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Does your home have a metal, composition, or tile (or other Class A) roof?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Does the house have noncombustible or ignition resistant siding material?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Are the eaves "boxed in" using noncombustible materials?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Has the 0-5 foot noncombustible zone been developed and maintained?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Is the underdeck area free of combustible material?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Is all firewood at least 30 feet from the house?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Get Ready

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
1. Is your Wildland Fire Action Plan completed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Do you have fire extinguishers on hand and know how to use them?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Do you know where your gas, electric and water main shut-off controls are?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Do you have several different evacuation routes planned?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Get Set

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
1. Are you able to monitor fire weather conditions and fire status?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Are you ready to evacuate as soon as you are aware of a possible threat to your home or evacuation route?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Do you have appropriate clothing (i.e. clothing made from natural fibers such as cotton and work boots)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Is your emergency supply kit on hand?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Are you able to stay close to your house, drink plenty of water and keep an eye on your family and pets until it is time to leave?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Go

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
1. Are you prepared to leave early enough to avoid being caught in fire, smoke or road congestion?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Do you have your predetermined location set when you evacuate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Do you have several travel routes in case one route is blocked by the fire or by emergency vehicles and equipment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Do you have your emergency supply kit containing your families and pet's necessary items?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



# My Personal Wildland Fire Action Guide

Write up your Wildland Fire Action Guide and post it in a location where every member of your family can see it. Rehearse it with your family. During High Fire Danger days in your area, monitor your local media for information and be ready to implement your plan. Hot, dry and windy conditions create the perfect environment for a wildland fire.

## Important Phone Numbers:

Fire Department: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Law Enforcement: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Out-of-Area Contact: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Work: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Evacuation Routes: \_\_\_\_\_

Meeting Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Location of Emergency Supply Kit: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

Incident Information: \_\_\_\_\_

For wildland fire information: [www.inciweb.org](http://www.inciweb.org)

