As you have heard in the news, much of Florida is under high fire danger. Frost, cold drying winds and little rain make our state a tender box. Lightning which often accompanies cold fronts easily starts wildfires. Take precautions in your yard to prevent fires and save your landscape and your home. Your neighborhood and the fire fighters will thank you.

Several measures are suggested to help protect homes in heavily wooded areas and reduce outdoor fire hazards. Realize that there is no guarantee that this will prevent damage to your home, but it will help reduce the fuel that feeds a fire and greatly reduce the chances of a fire spreading to your home.

Cut or trim forest trees and underbrush at least 30' from your home. Cut or trim branches to at least 15' off the ground. This can help prevent ground fires from moving into tree tops. Don't let branches hang directly over your roof. These measures will help eliminate the fuel that is necessary to continue rapid fire spread.

Keep roof and gutters clear of pine needles and leaves. Be careful if you or family members get on to the roof. You don't want to become a casualty while trying to prevent a disaster!

Locate wood piles at least 30' from the home or buildings. Don't store combustibles such as gasoline for the mower or paint thinners in or near valuable structures. Old tires and trash should be hauled to the landfill.

Have garden hoses hooked up to an outside water supply. It provides an additional water source should fires approach. Many of the natural swamps, creeks and ponds used to fill tanker trucks are empty in dry weather. Your water may be the only water available.

Have tools handy outside such as ladders, rakes and shovels to help put out small ground fire. Firefighters may need them if they are called to your area.

Fire fighters suggest that if fire approaches and you choose to get onto the roof, put the ladder up on the front side of the house. If fire fighters can't see you when they survey an area, the ladder gives them the clue that you may be on the roof in the back. They can check to be sure you are safe and haven't fallen.

Follow all Division of Forestry burning laws. You must call them at (407) 856-6512 before any outdoor burning so they know where you are and can alert you of any special precautions. Also, please call your local fire department.

When law enforcement officials advise you to evacuate, please follow their instructions.

We hope you don't have to evacuate, but don't take unnecessary chances. Be prepared now by having important papers handy. Have a video or paper inventory of valuable belongings. You may have a copy in a safe deposit box, but also send a copy to a relative out of state for safe keeping. Put together a family plan so you know what needs to be gathered when you go to a friend's house or shelter to make your stay more comfortable.

Be especially careful of fire in outdoor grills. Note that automobile catalytic converters are so hot they can ignite dry grass and start a fire. Don’t park or leave the car running on dry grass. Occasionally, glass bottles can focus sunlight like a magnifying glass and start a fire, so be sure litter is picked up from the yard or nearby fields and road sides.

Information on preparing for fires and other disasters is available on the University of Florida EDIS web site. Visit our Osceola County Extension web site and link to the EDIS Home Page. If you prefer, call the
Osceola Cooperative Extension office at (321) 697-3000 to get a packet of information or to request an educational program in your area.

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