



A CALL TO END THE DESTRUCTION OF COMMUNITIES BY WILDFIRE

Policy 2: Current codes and standards, as well as sound land use practices, must be in use and enforced for new development and rebuilding in wildfire-prone areas

Over the past decade, the U.S. has witnessed a steady increase in wildfire activity. Experts predict this trend will continue. Despite billions of dollars to support wildland fire suppression efforts, the number of homes lost in wildfires per year has increased by 163 percent, and wildfires now cost the U.S. an estimated \$63 to \$285 billion per year in losses.

Between 1990 and 2010, the footprint of the wildland/urban interface (WUI), the term that describes the area where homes and communities encroach wildfire hazard prone landscapes, grew by 33 percent, to over 190 million acres. The number of homes on those lands expanded by 41 percent, to at least 43.4 million units. To protect lives and property, communities must address where and how they build homes and businesses. This will require the use of comprehensive land use planning.

Land use planning tools and practices offer the means to reduce the risk wildfires pose to both future and existing development. Comprehensive, or general, plans guide the development of a community, usually on a 20-to-30-year time frame, and contain community goals as well as the policy objectives needed to reach them. But comprehensive use of these tools and practices is not widespread. Universal adoption of land use planning at the local level, supported through state and federal policies, is urgently needed to lower the danger wildfires pose to thousands of communities.

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States must require plan development that addresses wildfire safety, including describing the hazards and risks in the community as well as identifying policy objectives to reduce risk over time and the necessary actions to effectuate those policies. These policies need to incorporate building and zoning codes as well as other development requirements. Hazard (the likelihood and potential intensity) assessments and risk (the impact on community members and property) for wildfires are also critical to helping planners and local leaders prioritize mitigation initiatives, track risk reduction activities, and incorporate wildfire safety into planning and regulatory policies. Communities need this information at several scales, from the regional to the community, down to the subdivision and parcel level. These assessments can show where land management actions will be most effective for reducing risk, identify community members who are at the highest risk, and illustrate how individual properties might help spread wildfire. All of this information can help prioritize mitigation actions

and guide development away from areas with the highest level of hazard. The more detailed information the community has developed through hazard and risk assessments, the better tailored these regulations can be. At the federal level, incentivization of planning for wildfires and hazard mitigation through access to funding and prioritization for land management activities must also continue.

Given the size and scope of the U.S. wildfire challenge, reaching the goals of a comprehensive wildfire strategy, including the use and full enforcement of current codes and standards as well as sound land use practices for new development and rebuilding in wildfire-prone areas, will take time. But, making progress toward these will reduce the risk to American homes, businesses, and prosperity. **The key to ending the destruction of communities by wildfire is to start now.**

Learn more about Outthink Wildfire by visiting nfpa.org/wildfirepolicy.

CITATIONS AND REFERENCES

www.nfpa.org/wildfirepolicy



RESOURCES

to assist communities in updating subdivision, zoning, building, and fire code requirements:

- NFPA 1141, Standard for Fire Protection Infrastructure for Land Development in Wildland, Rural, and Suburban Areas
- NFPA 1142, Standard for Water Supplies for Suburban and Rural Fire Fighting
- NFPA 1144, Standard for Reducing Structure Ignition Hazards from Wildland Fire
- USDA Forest Service: Wildfire Risk to Communities website

The National Fire Protection Association® (NFPA®) outlined a comprehensive strategy that will push for the transformations that, over time, will significantly reduce risk to communities. The strategy is rooted in two realities—wildfires are going to happen, and the fire service will not be able to extinguish wildfires at a pace to save people and property in their path.

To solve the wildfire problem, these five tenets must be supported by all levels of government:

- 1. Require all homes and businesses in the wildland/urban interface (WUI) to be more resistant to ignition from wildfire embers and flames.**
- 2. Current codes and standards, as well as sound land use practices, must be in use and enforced for new development and rebuilding in wildfire-prone areas.**
- 3. Fire departments for communities in the WUI must be prepared to respond safely and effectively to wildfire.**
- 4. Government must increase resources for vegetative fuel management.**
- 5. The public must understand its role and take action in reducing wildfire risk.**



**OUTTHINK
WILDFIRE**
WILDFIRE ACTION POLICIES

