

CAN YOUR PROPERTY

survive a wildfire?

Firewise Spring Checklist

- ✓ Remove dead branches hanging over your roof.
- ✓ Remove branches within 15 feet of your chimney.
- ✓ Cover chimney outlet and stovepipe with a nonflammable screen of ½ inch or smaller mesh.
- ✓ Stack woodpiles at least 30 feet away from all structures and clear grasses at least 10 feet from base of piles.
- ✓ Remove any flammable debris (i.e. leaves, needles, construction materials, wood) from your yard.
- ✓ Clean all dead leaves and needles from roof and gutters.
- ✓ Remove grass and screen in areas under decks—if you have lattice work, attach mesh screen to the inside. The idea is to prevent firebrands or embers from blowing under your deck and igniting a fire that could also spread to your house.
- ✓ If you use wood mulch near structures, consider a change to decorative rock, brick or other non-combustible materials.

Spring will soon give way to summer, bringing with it hot, dry days and the inevitable start of Montana's fire season. Whatever your opinion about climate change, it's an undeniable fact that the fire season in Big Sky Country is starting earlier, lasting longer, and burning hotter. This is daunting news not only for firefighters, but also for Montanans living in the *wildland urban interface*—where forests and rangelands abut private property, increasing the risks of losses due to wildfires.

An increasing amount of research over the years suggests that homeowners can greatly increase the chances of their home surviving an approaching wildfire by employing Firewise—the process of reducing the fire risk by clearing away vegetation, removing debris from roofs and gutters, and maintaining existing landscaping appropriately. This process of creating *defensible space* has saved homes right here in Montana. While there are no guarantees, taking a proactive approach makes sense.

Creating defensible space is a relatively easy thing to do. Most of the work can be done by homeowners, and should be incorporated into usual "spring clean-up" each year.

Remember, the goal is to get an approaching fire to the ground where it can be more easily suppressed and, at the same time, eliminate the likelihood that falling embers will ignite your home, deck, or nearby structures. ■

For more information, visit the FireSafe Montana website at: www.firesafemt.org

The diagram below illustrates the concept of defensible space:

