Construction Checklist

When constructing, renovating, or adding to a Firewise home, consider the following:

- Choose a Firewise location.
- Design and build a Firewise home.
- Employ Firewise landscaping and maintenance.

To select a Firewise location, observe the following:

- Slope of terrain; be sure to build on the most level portion of the land, since fire spreads rapidly, even on minor slopes.
- Set your single-story structure at least 30 feet back from any ridge or cliff; increase the distance if your home will be higher than one story.

In designing and building your Firewise home, remember the two main goals are; (1) to reduce the flammability of the house and (2) to reduce exposure to a forest fire.

- Use construction materials that are fire-resistant or non-combustible whenever possible.
- For roof construction, consider using materials such as Class-A asphalt shingles, slate or clay tile, metal, cement and concrete products, or terra-cotta tiles.
- Constructing a fire-resistant sub-roof will add protection, as well.
- For exterior wall siding, fire-resistant materials such as stucco or masonry are much better than wood or vinyl (which can soften and melt).
- Windows can break easily when exposed to fire, opening up a path for fire to enter the house. Tempered glass is more resistant to breakage than single or double-pane glass. Use this for the largest, most exposed picture windows. Smaller panes (<2' wide) hold up better in their frames than larger ones when exposed to fire. Try using multiple smaller panes rather than one large one.
- Plastic skylights can melt, and allow fire to drop into a house. Non-flammable covers can be made for skylights and windows.
- To prevent sparks from entering your home through vents, cover exterior attic and under floor vents with wire mesh no larger than 1/8 of an inch; make sure under eave and soffit vents are closer to the roof line than the wall; and box in eaves, but provide adequate ventilation to prevent condensation.
- Include a driveway that is wide enough: 12 feet wide with a vertical clearance of 15 feet and a slope that is less than 12 percent to provide easy access for fire engines. The driveway and access roads should be well maintained, clearly marked, and include ample turnaround space near the house. Also consider access to water supply, if possible.
- Keep gutters, eaves, and roof clear of leaves and other debris.

- Make an occasional inspection of your home, looking for deterioration such as breaks and spaces between roof tiles, warping wood, or cracks and crevices where sparks can gather.
- Also, inspect your property, clearing dead wood and dense vegetation from at least 30 feet from your house, and moving firewood away from the house, decks or fences.

Any structures attached to the house, such as decks, porches, fences, and outbuildings should be considered part of the house. These structures can act as fuses or fuel bridges, particularly if constructed from flammable materials.

- Prevent combustible materials and debris from accumulating beneath decks or elevated porches; screen or box in these areas.
- Make sure an elevated wooden deck is not located at the top of a hill where it will be in direct line of a fire moving up slope; consider a terrace instead.
- If you wish to attach an all-wood fence to your home, use masonry or metal as a protective barrier between the fence and house.
- Use non-flammable metal when constructing a trellis and cover with high-moisture, nonflammable vegetation.

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