

Wildfires

Wildfires are common in Texas, especially after long periods of drought. They can spread quickly and produce dangerous smoke, threatening property, lives and health. Help reduce your risks by learning how to respond.

What do I need to know about a wildfire in my area?

Be prepared to evacuate. When the threat of wildfires is high, stay tuned to local radio, television or get information from the National Weather Service about NOAA Weather Radio. Be prepared to evacuate immediately. Taking the following precautions can help you evacuate safely and quickly:

- Park your car in the direction of escape and keep the windows rolled up to prevent smoke from entering.
- Load your family disaster supply kit in the car and keep family photos or other things you plan to take with you nearby. See the Family Preparedness Fact Sheet for details.
- Don't let children or other family members stray far from home.
- Wear protective clothing (long sleeves and long pants) and keep a handkerchief in your pocket to protect your face.
- Confine all pets to one room or area of the yard so you can gather them quickly.

- Leave the lights in your home on so that fire fighters can see it through dense smoke.
- Before you leave, call an out-of-town contact and tell them where you plan to go.

What are the health threats of wildfire smoke?

Smoke can pose a serious health threat, especially if you have chronic heart or lung disease. Children and older adults are also at greater risk. Even healthy people can be affected by smoky conditions.

Smoke from wildfires is a mixture of gases and fine particles from burning trees and plants. It can hurt your eyes, irritate your respiratory system and worsen symptoms from pre-existing conditions. Common symptoms of smoke exposure include:

- Coughing
- Scratchy throat
- Irritated sinuses
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Headaches
- Stinging eyes
- Runny nose

If you experience any of these symptoms, take the following measures:

- Limit outdoor activities as much as possible. When you must go outside, wear a protective mask with an N-95 rating and avoid physical exertion.

- Keep the windows and doors of your home shut.
- Run the air conditioner with the fresh-air intake closed and use high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters.
- Avoid cooking as much as possible.
- Do not burn candles or use fireplaces.
- Do not use vacuum cleaners which can stir up dust already inside your home.
- Keep your airways moist by drinking plenty of water. To help relieve dryness, breathe through a warm, wet cloth.