



WILDFIRE RISK AND HILLSIDE EVACUATION STRATEGIES

Make sure your home is fire safe!

Scott Shurtz, Fire Chief Central Marin Fire Department

If you've taken the necessary precautions, your home will stand a much greater chance of surviving all but the worst-case fire scenarios. However, significant annual effort is needed to clear vegetation and other combustibles from around the home. As a start, ask yourself these questions:

- Are there areas of continuous vegetation from the yard to the house?
 - Do I have wood siding or wood roof shingles?
 - Do I have dry leaves, needles or branches on my roof or in my rain gutters?
 - Do I have firewood stacked against the home or under the deck?
 - Do I live on a steep slope with an abundance of vegetation below the house?
 - Are there tree limbs contacting the house or growing within 6 feet of the roof?
- If the answer is YES to any of the above, then you have work to do.

FIND MORE INFORMATION ON PREPARING YOUR HOME AND PROPERTY AT:

<https://www.firesafemarin.org/preparedness>

Pay attention to the weather!

Vegetation fires need three factors present to become firestorm events. These are the conditions that are considered by the National Weather Service when issuing a "RED FLAG WARNING."

1. High Temperatures 2. Low Humidity 3. High Winds

- If all of these factors are present, you need to be aware that dangerous conditions are present.
 - Be ready to mobilize if you see or smell smoke. It is better to leave the area early before road congestion and environmental conditions worsen.
 - Consider keeping a radio tuned to a news channel for the day.
 - Make sure everyone in the family is aware of the situation and knows your family plan.
- PAY ATTENTION TO THE WEATHER AND YOUR SURROUNDINGS!**

SIGN UP FOR ALERT MARIN to receive evacuation warnings by visiting:

<https://www.marinsheriff.org/services/emergency-services/alert-marin> or by typing alertmarin.org into your browser or search engine

Travel Strategies

The key to evacuation is to leave the area early before the streets become crowded and visibility and breathing conditions become compromised due to smoke conditions. As we saw during the North Bay fires, it is very difficult to predict what will happen on an extreme day. However, based on our local fire weather patterns, a strong, dry, off-shore wind (from the north or northeast) is the scenario that fire professionals feel is the most likely to create conditions that would require the need for evacuations. **THIS IS NOT THE ONLY SCENARIO THAT IS POSSIBLE.** It is simply a scenario that is commonly considered due to local weather patterns, topography and the location and arrangement of homes.

If you have been paying attention to the factors that contribute to dangerous fire weather, you will have improved situational awareness and your reflex time (the time it takes to implement your evacuation plan) will be reduced.

Remember, **you do not need to wait for authorities to issue an evacuation order**. If you sense danger and are feeling concerned about your vulnerability during an extreme weather event, you should consider leaving the area until conditions improve.

If evacuating, use streets that provide direct egress out of the area. If there are any alternate routes out of your neighborhood, learn and practice them now. You want to understand and be very familiar with your optional routes before the emergency, when anxiety will be high and visibility may be low. Stay off trails unless there are no other alternatives and do not take routes you're unfamiliar with unless specifically directed by authorities.

Evacuation Terminology

It is important to be familiar with evacuation terminology. In Marin, fire agencies and law enforcement will use the terms *Evacuation Warning*, *Evacuation Order* and *Shelter in Place*.

Evacuation Warning

Fire is expected to arrive in 2 hours or more, with threat to civilian life. Evacuate as soon as possible. See <https://www.firesafemarin.org/preparedness/evacuation> for an Evacuation Checklist. Depending on the specific information provided in the warning, there may be time to further prepare your home. However, because of the high-risk conditions and limited routes out of many of our wildland interface areas, residents should plan to leave as soon as possible after receiving an Evacuation Warning. **Be aware that waiting increases the likelihood that you will encounter greater challenges and additional hazards while evacuating.**

Evacuation Order

Fire is expected to arrive in less than 2 hours (but possibly much sooner), with threat to civilian life. Evacuate immediately, do not delay to gather belongings or prepare your home.

Shelter in Place

Community members should stay secured in current location. Sheltering in place may be used when evacuation would cause greater threat to life.

Modes of Evacuation

There are no evacuation regulations that must be followed, here or anywhere. Only strategies and suggestions can be offered. Common sense, preparedness and awareness are keys to a successful evacuation.

Plan on early evacuation by car, meaning well ahead of any active fire or ember shower activity in the immediate area. FIRESafe Marin has an extensive discussion of evacuation preparation and procedures at <https://www.firesafemarin.org/preparedness/evacuation>. If you plan to evacuate in a vehicle that is typically kept in a garage, be sure that your garage door equipment has a battery backup in case the

power is out when it's time to leave. You should also be familiar with the procedure to open the door manually.

Understand that your escape doesn't involve traveling tremendous distances. In Southern California and in certain locations of the East Bay hills, residents need to travel - in some cases - several miles to reach safety.

It should be emphasized that it is generally unsafe to be outside (on foot or a bicycle) during a firestorm. It is dangerous to be caught in a situation where it is too late or too difficult to evacuate, but if confronted with that reality, the protection of a vehicle or house is preferred to being exposed to the environment during the passage of a fire front. If evacuating by vehicle, the [FIRESafe Marin Evacuation Guide](#) recommends:

- *Do not leave your vehicle unless there is no other option or your car is on fire. Leaving your car is a last resort and may prove deadly. You are almost always safer in your car or a building.*
- *Do not abandon your car in the roadway. Park it off the road if there is no other option.*

As emphasized above, the key is to leave the area early before the streets become crowded. **You do not need to wait for authorities to issue an evacuation order.** If you are aware of critical weather conditions (such as those during Red Flag Warnings) and you smell a strong odor of smoke or sense other dangers, you should consider leaving the area until conditions improve or it becomes clear that your neighborhood is not threatened.

Remember that there are almost 2000 residents for every on-duty firefighter, so during a community-wide disaster, it will not be possible for emergency responders to provide the personalized service that residents have come to expect during more localized emergencies. Wildfires are dynamic events! Because of this, there are too many possible scenarios and variables to realistically provide a predetermined solution for each. When it comes down to it, people who live or spend time in the wildland interface areas need to be prepared to make decisions about their safety and survival without the immediate assistance of professional emergency response personnel. Become familiar with your evacuation options, prepare your property, have a plan for your family, maintain situational awareness and be ready to act in the case of an emergency.

We at the Fire Department are happy to provide advice and information as it relates to the wildfire threat to the community but the Police Department is ultimately in charge of evacuation procedures and protocols. Please feel free to reach out to your NRG leaders, the Fire Department or the Police Department if you have any additional questions regarding evacuations.

Be Safe - Be Prepared!