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NEWS

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Front Range Wildfires Highlight Importance of Planning to Protect Homes

GOLDEN, Colo. – The wind-driven fires in Jefferson, Boulder, Teller and Larimer counties over the past two weeks, which have led to the evacuation of hundreds of homes and burned thousands of acres, herald the start of an early wildfire season in Colorado. With firefighters directly involved in structure protection on several of these incidents, the fires also highlight the need for landowners in the wildland-urban interface to address fire protection before flames race toward their homes.

“Although there is no guarantee firefighters will be able to save your home from a wildfire, the odds increase if you have created defensible space around the structures on your property,” said Lisa Mason, outreach forester for the Colorado State Forest Service and Colorado’s “Are You FireWise?” program lead. Defensible space refers to the area around a home or other structure where trees and other vegetation are treated, cleared or reduced to slow the spread of wildfire.

Mason suggests that landowners take the following actions to create defensible space around their homes in preparation for wildfire:

- Remove all flammable vegetation within 15 feet of any part of a home, including decks.
- Thin standing trees within 75-125 feet of all structures, and locate the wider buffer below homes on steep terrain.
- Allow at least 10 feet between the branches of standing trees.
- Prune up tree branches to a height of at least 10 feet.
- Dispose of slash, such as limbs and other woody debris, by chipping or piling and burning in winter (contact a CSFS district office about how to safely and legally burn slash).
- Keep grasses and weeds surrounding the home mowed to a height of less than six inches.
- Stack firewood and locate propane tanks at least 30 feet from and uphill of structures.
- Clear all vegetation within 10 feet of woodpiles, propane tanks, sheds and other structures.
- Remove pine needles from gutters and trim overhanging branches.

In addition to creating defensible space, the CSFS emphasizes the importance of having fire-resistant roofing materials, because wood or shake shingles ignite easily. The CSFS also encourages subdivisions

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to establish Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs) to effectively mitigate the risk of wildfire throughout entire neighborhoods.

A more comprehensive list of tips for creating defensible space and information on developing a CWPP is available on the Colorado State Forest Service website at www.coloradoforests.co.

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