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NEWS

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Jefferson County Evacuations Highlight the Need for Protecting Homes from Wildfire

FORT COLLINS, Colo. – Any doubt about whether Colorado’s fire season is underway was dispelled yesterday by the wind-driven Blackhawk Fire in Jefferson County that led to the evacuation of 340 homes and burned more than 10 acres. Luckily, the fire did not burn any structures and is being mopped up today, but it highlighted the need for landowners to address fire protection before flames race toward their doorstep.

“The ability of your home to survive a wildfire largely depends on defensible space – the area around a structure where trees and other vegetation are treated, cleared or reduced to slow the spread of wildfire,” said Lisa Mason, outreach forester for the Colorado State Forest Service and Colorado’s “Are You FireWise?” program lead.

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 (limbs and other woody debris) by chipping, or by 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 to establish Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs) to effectively mitigate the risk of wildfire throughout entire neighborhoods.

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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 csfs.colostate.edu.

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