



KEEP SAFE

A Monthly Publication for Texas Electric Cooperatives

October 2009

Rural fire safety and prevention

Self-reliance is the rule for fire safety for many people. If you live in an area where the local fire department is more than a few minutes away because of travel time or distance, or if you are outside the limits of the nearest town, be sure you know how to be self-reliant in a fire emergency. Use these fire safety tips to help protect yourself, your home and its surroundings from fire.

A move from an urban center to a suburb or rural area requires you to rethink fire safety. First, you must be aware of special fire hazards near wooded areas. Second, geographic location may create longer response times for fire and rescue services.

If you live in the rural-urban interface, the point where homes meet combustible vegetation, you must increase your role to protect lives and property in your community beyond the city limits.

Fire facts about rural living

- ◆ Once a fire starts outdoors in a rural area, it is often hard to control. Wildland firefighters are trained to protect natural resources, not homes and buildings.
- ◆ Many homes are located far from fire stations. The result is longer emergency response times. Within a matter of minutes, an entire home may be destroyed by fire.
- ◆ Limited water supply in rural areas can make fire suppression difficult.
- ◆ Homes may be secluded and surrounded by woods, dense brush and combustible vegetation that fuel fires.

Tips for making your property fire resistant

- ◆ Keep lawns trimmed, leaves raked, and the roof and rain-gutters free from debris such as dead limbs and leaves. Stack firewood at least 30 feet away from your home.
- ◆ Store flammable materials, liquids and solvents in metal containers outside the home at least 30 feet away from structures and wooden fences.
- ◆ Create defensible space by thinning trees and brush within 30 feet around your home.
- ◆ Landscape your property with fire resistant plants and vegetation to prevent fire from spreading quickly.
- ◆ Post home address signs that are clearly visible from the road.
- ◆ Provide emergency vehicle access with properly constructed driveways and roadways, at least 12 feet wide with adequate turnaround space.
- ◆ Make sure water sources, such as hydrants and ponds, are accessible to the fire department.
- ◆ Burning yard waste is a fire hazard. Check with your local fire agency on a non-emergency number for fire permit requirements and restricted burning times.

Protect your home

- ◆ Use fire resistant, protective roofing and materials like stone, brick and metal to protect your home. Avoid using wood materials that offer the least fire protection.
- ◆ Cover all exterior vents, attics and eaves with metal mesh screens no larger than 6 millimeters.
- ◆ Install multipane windows, tempered safety glass or fireproof shutters to protect windows from radiant heat.
- ◆ Use fire-resistant draperies for added window protection.

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- ◆ Have chimneys, wood stoves and all home heating systems inspected and cleaned annually by a certified specialist.

Prepare your family

- ◆ Know how to contact fire emergency services in your area.
- ◆ Plan ahead. Make sure you and your family are prepared for a fire emergency.

- ◆ Develop and practice escape and evacuation plans with your family.

- ◆ Install smoke alarms on every level of your home. Test them monthly and change the batteries at least once a year. Consider installing the new long-life smoke alarms.

— Source, *FireSafety.gov*

Keeping extinguishers in shape

Portable fire extinguishers can be vital in preventing a small fire from turning into a major incident. But the devices cannot provide protection unless they are properly maintained. OSHA has established the following rules regarding fire extinguishers:

- ◆ The employer is responsible for maintaining and testing all portable fire extinguishers in the workplace.
- ◆ Fire extinguishers or hoses need to be visually inspected at least once a month.
- ◆ A maintenance check should be performed on all extinguishers at least once annually, and records of this check should be kept for one year. Stored pressure extinguishers do not require an internal examination.
- ◆ Dry-chemical extinguishers that require a 12-year hydrostatic test should be emptied for full maintenance every six years. Those with non-refillable disposable containers are exempt from this requirement.
- ◆ Hydrostatic testing should be performed by trained individuals with suitable testing equipment and facilities.
- ◆ When portable extinguishers are removed for maintenance or recharging, the employer is required to provide an equal alternative.

— *Safety+Health*

Home safety from the bottom up

Even if you don't spend a lot of time in the basement of your home, that's no reason to ignore safety precautions. Here, taken from the National Safety Council's brochure "Your Home Safety Checklist," are tips to make your basement a safe place.

- ◆ Tag your gas and water lines so that you can find and turn them off in case of an emergency.
- ◆ Everyone in your family should know where your main electrical switch is located and how to turn it off. The same goes for gas and water service.
- ◆ Know how to light the pilot light on your furnace and water heater.
- ◆ Label fuse boxes and circuit breakers according to which outlets and fixtures they protect. Know the fuse ratings for your electrical circuits.
- ◆ Ensure that your washer and dryer are electrically grounded. Dampness near laundry appliances can cause shocks or electrocutions.
- ◆ If you store cleaning fluids, drain openers, ammonia, bleach and other hazardous substances in the basement, be sure they are out of a child's reach.
- ◆ Keep basement passageways free of clutter.
- ◆ Position light fixtures and switches so you can turn them on without stumbling in the dark.
- ◆ Install a smoke detector.

— *Safety+Health*

Loss Control School Schedule

Hotline 1 – 4 School (*Livingston*) October 5 – 9

Basic Pole Climbing (*Quitman*)

October 13 - 16

Underground School (*Levelland*) October 12 – 16

Underground School (*Merkel*)

October 19 – 23

Basic Pole Climbing (*Hondo*) October 27 - 30

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