



# Firewise: Red Flag Warning Days

Many of us first learned about Red Flag Warning days in October 2017. It's very important that we understand the conditions of Red Flag Warning days and what we can do to prepare. A Red Flag Warning alert issued by the National Weather Service is a time when conditions for a fire are at the highest. Three criteria are considered prior to issuing a red flag warning. These measurable readings include:

- Sustained wind speeds
- Relative humidity
- 10-hour fuel moisture

The US National Weather Service warning is to inform area firefighters and land management agencies that conditions are ideal for wildland fire combustion. Cal Fire and local fire agencies all go on a high alert status under these conditions. The Santa Ana winds can occur in Southern California several times a year, but in Northern California, Red Flag Warnings from the Diablo (northeasterly) winds usually only occur once or twice a year -- usually in fall or late summer when very dry conditions prevail.

If you live in a high fire danger area, here are some things you can do when Red Flag Warnings are issued. State and local news agencies usually announce Red Flag Warning 24-48 hours in advance on TV and radio, so there is time to act to ensure short-term fixes.

## **What should you do to prepare?**

- If you have one of the weather applications on your smartphone, check for the warnings in your area or on any of the weather sites online.
- Make sure garden hoses are on and are extended throughout your garden with spray nozzles attached; best practice is to never leave a garden hose randomly piled up as it will always tangle – if you want it coiled, coil it in equal sized oval loops with each successive loop offset few inches in the same direction.
- All portable propane tanks (BBQ, smoker, etc.) should be turned off and moved away from your house.
- If you have a pool: in an emergency, a pressure washer can be used to pump water from your pool and should be left in an available location; firefighters should have clear access to your pool.
- Decks should be cleared above and below of flammable objects.
- Gas cans – for lawn mowers, chippers, whatever – should be moved away from house or garage/barn.
- Cover firewood stacks next to or near the house with a fire-resistant cover.
- Make sure cell phones are charged and ready for alerts and within hearing at all times.
- Close exterior doors and windows. Leave doors unlocked. Leave lights on inside and outside the house.
- If you have a ladder, leave it available outside, next to the house, in case firefighters need to access the roof.
- Have all your evacuation supplies such as flashlights and a portable radio ready to go.

- Make sure your cars have plenty of gas and are parked outside, or that the garage door is capable of manual operation and all capable family members know how to open it.
- If appropriate, shut off the gas supply line at the meter.

**Some things to do well in advance:**

- Make an evacuation plan and collect all necessary supplies.
- Clean gutters and roof free of debris regularly.
- Where possible, install mesh screening to prevent burning material from blowing under decks.
- Move firewood piles at least 30 feet away from the house and other structures.
- If you have a pool, research (and buy) the special pump systems available for firefighting.

**Reference Materials for further reading:**

- Cal Fire Red Flag Days: [http://www.fire.ca.gov/communications/communications\\_firesafety\\_redflagwarning](http://www.fire.ca.gov/communications/communications_firesafety_redflagwarning)
- Wildfire Home Assessment & Checklist: [http://disastersafety.org/wp-content/uploads/wildfire-checklist\\_IBHS.pdf](http://disastersafety.org/wp-content/uploads/wildfire-checklist_IBHS.pdf)
- Homeowner's Checklist Cal Fire <http://www.readyforwildfire.org/docs/files/File/Checklist.pdf>

For help with your garden problems, call the Master Gardener hotline at 565-2608, visit the Master Gardener information desk in the University of California Cooperative Extension office (133 Aviation Blvd., #109, Santa Rosa), or ask a Master Gardener at your local farmers market, the Sonoma County Fair or other event. Visit <http://ucanr.edu/sites/scmg/> for additional publications.

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