

WILDFIRE HOME EVALUATION GUIDELINES

Information on structures is collected for a number of reasons. First and foremost is to provide homeowners and landowners with educational information on defensible space, hazards, and fuels reduction needs in order to better prepare people living in the wildland urban interface for a wildfire situation.

Home evaluation work is also done under a variety of conditions. The cadre may be called to complete evaluation work and training at a local level with a volunteer fire department or under the command of an incident management team. The following document provides *general* guidelines that can be used when collecting structural evaluation data. However, direction when working with homeowners, mitigation planners, and fire teams may vary depending on the situation in which a team is utilized.

Pre-coordination Procedures

- ❑ Before arrival, work should start at the local level to determine where evaluation work is to be completed. Work with the county, as well as other entities, to determine what maps and other GIS data is available and can be used by the cadre. Ownership maps, as well as topography, fuels data, WUI information, existing structural information, roads, and other records may be needed to identify the location of all structures in a designated evaluation area. Initially, it is important to tie in with key players or spokespersons within the community; or at least those with a visible interest regarding wildfire threats within the urban interface. Time invested with these individuals greatly encourages the participation of the broader community.
- ❑ Prior to any evaluation work being completed in a designated area, notification of homeowners in an area that the cadre will be working should take place. Canvassing a neighborhood prior to an evaluation yields great results. It allows us to provide information on why and how evaluations are being completed, provides an opportunity for questions and feedback, and coordinates scheduled visits with homeowners. Along with canvassing, disseminating information about evaluations can be handled in the following ways:
 1. News release/newspaper article/PSA.
 2. Fliers/posters that can be placed in the area that is targeted for evaluation.
 3. Mailings to the homeowners in a designated area.
 4. Cold calling to homeowners in a designated area (provided the information is available).
- ❑ After an area has been canvassed and a schedule for evaluations developed, check this against any structural maps that may exist in order to determine which homeowners have not been contacted or if any structures have been overlooked. Work with the local fire department or county on direction for collecting information from these areas. For homeowners not contacted, or where permission is not granted, evaluation information from the nearest available location may be used. (More often than not, this means the road.) **If a homeowner does not want an evaluation, do not force this issue with them. Do not trespass onto private lands to collect data.**
- ❑ If you are having difficulty getting homeowners to agree to buy into the concept of protecting their home from wildfire, consider establishing a home protection zone “demonstration site” in a highly visible location near the neighborhood you are targeting. The “aesthetic” look of a treated home site appeals to many homeowners, and often doesn’t match the “mental vision” they may imagine is necessary to protect their home from wildfire.

Inspection procedures

- ❑ When visiting each site, two people from the cadre should work together to collect evaluation data. One individual should use the Palm Pilot with the preloaded RedZone survey to collect data and should also take a minimum of two photographs of the site; the other should work with the resident/homeowner to collect data using the “Wildfire Home Protection Zone Evaluation – Homeowner Form”. If possible, both individuals should have a good understanding of current “Wildland Urban Interface” issues, and a basic knowledge of fire behavior characteristics (a working knowledge of structural fire suppression tactics also helps).

- ❑ Whenever possible, encourage the resident/homeowner to complete the evaluation with you in order to get the most complete information and to accomplish the primary goal of providing site specific prevention education to the homeowner. Only as a last resort should you do the evaluation without the homeowner or their agent present. If you work with the homeowner to find a mutually agreeable time and date when you can meet with them, you will be able to reduce or eliminate potential problems regarding legal access to the property. It is critical to get buy-in from the homeowner, as this directly relates to future maintenance of fire mitigation actions accomplished on the property.
- ❑ If a homeowner is unable to complete an evaluation with you, or if they are not a permanent resident of the home being evaluated (because they have a renter or it is a vacation home), ASK if you can follow up with them at the end of your evaluation to talk about what you've observed. Also, let the homeowner know that a copy of the computer-generated report from the Wildfire Home Protection Zone Evaluation can be mailed back to them.
- ❑ Start the inspection with a full walk-around of the area adjacent to the home. Include any adjacent structures during this review. This is a good time to engage the homeowner in a general discussion of wildfire hazards. Look for unusual hazards: motor homes, boats, abandoned/disabled vehicles adjacent to the home, dynamite, ammunition, flammable liquids, etc; as well as common hazards: overhead power lines, firewood, propane/fuel tanks, patio furniture, etc. These should be addressed by written comment on the homeowner form.
- ❑ Following the walk-around, start your evaluation of the structure. (Side A is generally the addressed side or the side with the front door. The remaining sides are B, C, & D labeled in a clockwise direction.) Address the roof, chimney, gutters, siding, windows, decks, eaves, balconies, attached wood fences, and any other risk factor directly associated with the structure itself.
- ❑ From the structure, you should move next to the 4-foot zone. This zone represents the highest wildfire risk to the structure, except the roof, as it allows fire to burn directly to the structure if not properly treated. End your evaluation with a thorough inspection of the 30 and 100-foot zones.
- ❑ Always leave the "Wildfire Home Protection Zone Evaluation – Homeowner Form" with the homeowner. This form should have a predetermined contact phone number (or numbers) for owners to use if they have follow-up questions or concerns. Be sure to discuss mitigation strategies with the homeowner, any resources that may be available to them and where to find them. If available, provide FireWise, Bushfire, and other literature and media.
- ❑ At the end of each data collection time frame, upload and organize the RedZone data from the Palm Pilots and photographs as quickly as possible. Delaying the uploading of information and photographs can make it difficult when trying to sort, analyze, and mail out products, and may result in a loss of data due to Palm Pilots with dead batteries.
- ❑ For homeowners that have requested it, print off and mail back computer-generated reports from the Wildfire Home Protection Zone Evaluation. When mailing back forms, reiterate where sources of information can be found, people or agencies to contact, and provide information about specific mitigation issues or questions. For example, if a homeowner has concerns about the types of vegetation to use around the home, provide them with a copy of *Fire-Resistant Plants for Home Landscapes* or *Firewise Guide to Landscape and Construction*.

Recommendations for Re-evaluation

It will be up to the individual agencies or departments to decide what they want or can reasonably do in regards to re-evaluating properties over time. For one entity, a reasonable goal may be to revisit again within three years, but for another, this may be out of the question. The number one priority should always be to work with homeowners that have not yet had an evaluation on their structures. Developing a positive relationship with the homeowner at the time of the visit will ensure that they keep you informed of changes they make to improve conditions around their property. Be sure to leave your contact information, as well as the contact information for the local rural or volunteer fire department, to facilitate the continuation of this relationship.