

Disaster Preparedness: Plan and Prepare Your Business for Wildfires

A wildfire, or forest fire, is an uncontrolled fire that occurs where natural vegetation is the predominant ground cover. Though wildfires usually occur in less developed, rural areas, they can threaten urban environments if they are not brought under control, and they are geographically widespread.

Losses from wildfires added up to \$5.1 billion over the past 10 years¹.

There were 1,167 large or significant wildfires and complexes reported in 2018². The impact of a wildfire can include direct property damage, cost of suppression, and damage to personal property and natural resources. The severity of effects is directly related to the intensity and extent of the wildfire.

Below is the Agility Recovery checklist of just some of the things to consider to prepare your business for such an event as well as to ensure the safety of the people within your organization.

Disaster Preparedness : Before the Wildfire

- Keep an adequate number of appropriate fire extinguishers in strategic locations (such as near loading docks and waste collection areas) and maintain them properly.
- Train key employees and their backups on how to use fire extinguishers correctly.
- Consider maintaining a water supply at your facility to control small fires until emergency personnel can arrive. You might install a water tank or hoses and pumps to an existing swimming pool, pond, river, or lake. Be sure the hoses are long enough and inspect them regularly.
- If your business is located in an area subject to freezing temperatures, be sure that water outlets and pumps are protected.
- Evaluate water levels in extreme hot and cold weather conditions.
- If your water pump uses electrical power, consider obtaining a gasoline- or diesel-powered pump or generator in case electricity is cut off during a fire. However, be aware of the risk of storing a large quantity of fuel. Use an appropriate storage facility that is protected against vehicle impacts and fire.
- Have appropriate tools, such as rakes, axes, saws, buckets, and shovels, available to help control small fires while waiting for emergency personnel to arrive.

1. Verisk's 2017 Wildfire Risk Analysis

2. https://www.nifc.gov/fireInfo/fireInfo_statistics.html

Disaster Preparedness : During the Wildfire

- Go to a pre-designated shelter area such as a safe room, basement, storm cellar, or the lowest building level. If there is no basement, go to the center of an interior room on the lowest level (closet, interior hallway) away from corners, windows, doors, and outside walls. Put as many walls as possible between you and the outside. Get under a sturdy table and use your arms to protect your head and neck. Do not open windows.
- Evacuation orders will often be swift and accurate for affected areas. However, if unable to evacuate, stay inside and away from outside walls. Close doors, but leave them unlocked in case firefighters need a quick access into your area.
- Turn on battery operated radio to get latest emergency information.
- If your office roof is accessible by ladder, prop it against the building so you and firefighters have roof access.
- Mark your position clearly with anything that may signal rescue workers to your presence inside the building. This could be articles of clothing or bright colored material attached to the outside of your location.
- Close windows, vents, doors, blinds, etc. Shut off gas meters, pilot lights, and propane tanks. Turn on all lights in the building to increase visibility in heavy smoke.

Disaster Preparedness : After the Wildfire

- Immediately check the roof (if accessible) and put out any fires, sparks, or embers.
- Contact your Agility Member Services Representative for direction on 'standing down' from an alert or declare status.
- If there is no power, check to make sure the main breaker is on. Fires may cause breakers to trip. If the breakers are on and power is still not available, contact the utility company.
- ALWAYS contact 911 if you believe it's potentially dangerous to re-enter the building and contact local experts before finally moving back in.

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Before the Wildfire : Your People

- Train your employees in general fire safety, especially for tasks with a high fire risk such as welding and cutting, fueling vehicles, working with flammable liquids, etc.
- Teach employees about the importance of good housekeeping and grounds maintenance in preventing and controlling fires.
- Have an adequate number of fire extinguishers and maintain them properly.
- Train key employees in when and how to use fire extinguishers.
- Consider when and how to evacuate employees if a wildfire threatens.
- Establish an evacuation plan and keep it up-to-date.
- Hold evacuation drills regularly so all employees will know who is in charge and so that they become familiar with evacuation routes and routines.
- Make sure all employees can get out of the building, find shelter, and communicate with responsible personnel.
- Plan primary and secondary exits from your buildings. Consider how employees will escape if doors or windows are blocked by an exterior fire.
- Plan two evacuation routes out of your neighborhood. Consider how employees will evacuate on foot if roads are closed or impossible to use, such as if they are blocked by emergency personnel.
- Remember that ponds, lakes, rivers, and landscaping or swimming pools can serve as safety zones.
- Keep appropriate emergency supplies on hand, including flashlights, battery-powered portable radio, extra batteries, first-aid kit, manual can opener, non-perishable foods, and bottled water. If designated employees will be working to protect the property, have appropriate clothing available, such as work boots and gloves, personal protective equipment, and sturdy work clothes.
- If you are located in a wildfire area, consider advising employees to keep personal disaster supplies and copies of important documents at work in case they need to evacuate immediately.

For further information on maintaining a culture of preparedness, consult your Agility Central portal. Contact us at contactus@agilityrecovery.com for more information on this or any other threat.

With an end-to-end solution, such as Agility Recovery, businesses can recover **4 times faster** than with no BCM solution.