

Protecting your house against wildfires

If you live in a rural area then your property maybe at risk should a forest fire start in the vicinity. The best way to protect against this is to clean your land to avoid a fire spreading to your property. The National Forest Authority gives 10 basic steps for the protection of properties in isolated rural areas as follows:

- Knowing the problem - Managing fuel (items that are inflammable such as bushes trees etc), in other words, knowing and managing the environment in the surrounding area - is the best way to protect your house.
- Define the Protection area. A minimum range of 50 meters (in some cases up to 100 meters for larger buildings) reduces the chances of a fire reaching your property.
- Reducing the most flammable vegetation. Give priority to a 10 meter watering area around the property avoiding the planting of inflammable vegetation.
- Thinning and pruning. It is important this is done regularly giving priority to weak or ill trees.
- Keep the surrounding area cleaned. Do not keep firewood, forest or agricultural debris, or any type of inflammable material within a 50 meter distance to the property, except when kept in separate buildings.
- Non-flammable pavement area. Keep an area of between 1 or 2 meters of pavement around the building, if possible.
- Unobstructed access. Make a protection area of 10 meters on the vehicular access side of the property so that large emergency vehicles can manoeuvre,
- Clean the roof and other structures of the house. Remove dried grass, dead leaves, pine needles, tree branches and moss from the roofing gutters, eaves and in wooden decking.
- Safety in your house. Place a net for the retention of sparks in the chimney and close any gaps where sparks may enter the interior of your home.

Clearly the management of the 50 -100 meter protection range could be a joint responsibility between you and your neighbours. It is important therefore to discuss this with them and work out a division of responsibility.

It is also important to note that the management of these areas is enforceable by law and there are heavy fines for non-compliance.

If you intend to clean your land by burning (lighting a fire) it is important to contact the local Bomberios to check first that the conditions are acceptable and whether any special conditions apply. Remember when the fire risk is "Very High" or "Extreme" and during the Critical Fire Period" normally 1st July to 30th September no burning is permitted.

In addition the National Civil Protection Authority recommends:

- Learn and teach fire safety practices;
- Always have a means to immediately and completely extinguishing the start of a fire (extinguisher, hoses, hoes, shovels, etc.);
- Use fire-resistant materials in the construction or renovation of your dwellings;
- Plant trees that can contribute to the easier containment of a fire line;
- Store combustible materials in safe areas outside your home;
- Note the location of the electric lines in relation to the treetops and if interfering inform the electricity supply company;
- Do not forget that treetops and shrubs should be at least 5 meters apart from the building and can never project onto your roof;
- Make evacuation plans of your house asking for the collaboration of the neighbours;
- Plan to use alternative roads to escape danger zones.