

# Wildfires

## INTRODUCTION



Wildfires are massive and uncontrolled fires that rage in forests or the countryside. These fires are also known as forest fires and bush fires.

They often begin unnoticed as a result of lightning strikes or careless human behavior. But, they can very easily get out of hand. Some wildfires burn for days or even weeks! These are extremely powerful and can destroy entire forests. Three elements are needed for wildfires to thrive. These three things are called the fire triangle. They include a fuel source, such as dry wood and plants, oxygen, and a heat source, such as a cigarette or a lightning strike.

Some wildfires are extremely difficult to control or put out. They can be enormous in size and rapidly change directions. Nonetheless, firefighters are well-trained to control these dangerous fires. There are two methods that firefighters use to control wildfires: a firebreak and an air drop.

A firebreak stops fires by removing the fuel source of the fire. Firefighters remove the fuel, such as bushes and grass in a long line in a place where the fire is advancing.

A firebreak stops fires by removing the fuel source of the fire. Firefighters remove the fuel, such as bushes and grass in a long line in a place where the fire is advancing.



An airdrop is the use of helicopters and airplanes for dropping massive amounts of water or chemicals from the air. Some aircrafts are capable of carrying thousands of gallons of liquid and drop it in areas that are too difficult to reach on the ground.

# Wildfires

## DIFFERENT TYPES

There are different kinds of wildfires that burn in different ways.

A **ground fire** is a type of wildfire that burns all organic materials below the forest floor.

This kind of fire usually moves very slowly.

**Surface fires** are the most common type of wildfire and burn on the surface of the ground. They usually consume small vegetation such as dry leaves, fallen branches and other materials on the ground. Surface fires move slowly and severely damage trees.

**Crown fires** have massive flames and are extremely powerful. They quickly spread between tree tops because of the wind and heat. This kind of wildfire is most destructive and is extremely difficult to put out.

A **spotting** is not really a kind of wildfire. It is a fire that starts when winds blow 'firebrands' away from crown fires onto new areas. A firebrand is a fireball that flies from a burning tree top to other areas.



# Dangerous Wildfires

## IN HISTORY

The deadliest wildfire in history occurred in 1871. The Great Peshtigo Fire struck in northern Wisconsin and Michigan. The cause of the fire was never determined. The huge fire destroyed more than 3.7 million acres and killed 2,500 people.



One of the most destructive wildfires in recent history happened in California in 2008. The California Wildfire consisted of more than 2,780 fires that lasted for a week. Over 1 million acres of land were destroyed and 23 people were killed. It is believed that the fires were triggered by lightning and heat.

In 1988, a number of small fires got out of control and destroyed more than 35% of Yellowstone National Park. More than 9,000 firefighters worked hard to control these massive fires, without much success. The wildfire was eventually put out by a snowstorm that hit the area.

# Things to know

## ABOUT WILDFIRES

In the United States, more than 100,000 wildfires occur every year. They destroy 4 to 5 million acres of land.

Wildfires move at speeds of around 14 miles per hour and burn everything in their path. Some wildfires are powerful enough to destroy entire towns.







Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Washington, Oregon and California are at greatest risk to wildfires in the United States.

Wildfires can cause 'fire tornadoes'. These are rare but are very destructive since they can be responsible for the rapid spread of the fire.

Around 80% of all wildfires are started by people.

Although wildfires can be very destructive, they also have a good effect on nature. They clean up dead plants so that the new plants can grow. They burn organic material which enriches the soil for new trees to grow.

Most large mammals are able to survive a wildfire. Their instincts tell them to leave their habitat before they are threatened by the fire. The animals that suffer the most are small and less mobile animals such as insects.

