

# Wildfires

A wildfire is an uncontrolled fire that has the ability to wipe out entire forests. Wildfires can burn for weeks, destroying almost everything in their path. Knowing what causes wildfires and how wildfires are stopped can help you make wise choices if you ever come across a wildfire.

## What Causes Wildfires?

All fires need 3 things in order to burn:

- Oxygen
- Fuel (anything that has the ability to catch fire)
- A heat source

These 3 components make up what firefighters refer to as the "Fire Triangle."

Because fires need fuel in order to continue to burn, many wildfires occur in forested areas, where there are plenty of trees to keep a fire burning. Also, many fires occur during dry periods during the summer and fall when leaves and branches have dried out and are able to burn more easily.

Wildfires can be sparked by a variety of natural causes including lightning, volcanic eruptions, or falling rocks that create a spark. However, humans cause the majority of wildfires. Careless actions like leaving a campfire alone or shooting off fireworks in a dry area can have disastrous consequences.

## Putting Out Wildfires

Firefighters have an important and dangerous job containing and stopping wildfires. Without firefighters risking their lives to contain fires, the damage to people's lives and homes would be considerably worse.

One of the ways firefighters fight fires is by creating firebreaks. A **firebreak** is a section of land that is clear of brush, leaves, branches, and



Trees were cleared out to create a firebreak.

other things that add fuel to the fire. This helps contain the fire.

Another method for fighting fires is creating **backfires**. A backfire is a fire that firefighters start on purpose to burn up anything that might help fuel the wildfire. Then, when the wildfire reaches the area where there has been a backfire, there is nothing left for it to burn.

A final method that is used for stopping wildfires is through the use of helicopters and planes. Aircraft will fly over the wildfire and dump water and chemicals on the fire to help stop it.

### **Wildfire Safety**

There are several steps you can take to keep yourself and your home safe from wildfires. The most important thing to do is to make sure you never accidentally start a wildfire. Make sure you never leave a fire unattended, and be careful with campfires and fireworks. To help keep your home safe, make sure you have a long garden hose, and plant fire-resistant plants around your house.

If there is a wildfire, make sure you evacuate if you are told to. When you leave, be aware of where the fire is and watch it carefully in case it starts to change directions.

