

Fire Evacuation Checklist

Guidelines

by Bill Sanders (bsanders@boonieliving.com)

There has been a lot written about our extreme fire danger and precautions we should take – but I haven't seen a usable checklist of steps to take when evacuation is imminent.

Under that kind of stress, even knowledgeable folks will forget things. But in addition to helping you remember, this checklist can do two things for the firefighters:

- convince them that your house can be saved
- give them information they need to fight effectively.

How to Use This Checklist

1. If you're reading this online, print it out. If possible, copy it on to heavy paper.
2. Go over it *before the crisis*, discussing how to accomplish each item *during the crisis*. Make assignments.
3. Fill out the Checklist (pages 2 & 3). The time frames are obviously approximate; no one knows if, much less when, an evacuation will be ordered.
4. When evacuation becomes a possibility, do each step and note results. [Some suggestions below.]
5. Post the Checklist (and any note you think useful for the fire fighters) on your front door as you leave. Protect it somehow (laminated, clear plastic bag, etc.). **Keep it brief & clear; they will be very busy.**

Suggestions for Filling Out the Checklist

Wildfire Mitigation Checklist: If already completed, check again gutters, vents, Defensible Space Zone 1, access by large vehicles. If you haven't done the list, do as much as you can, starting with items above.

Leave Doors Unlocked: Latch any door that tends to blow open (remember: fires create wind). If applicable, leave note for fire fighters concerning latched doors.

Separate Note to Fire Fighters: Include fire retardant features that aren't obvious; items not on Checklist; etc. Write several hours prior, so you can rewrite, if necessary. **Major items only: they're busy.**

Remember, this Checklist has three, equally important, goals:

1. Action items for you
2. Information for firefighters
3. Argument that your house is save-able.

So fill it out and post it with items #2 and 3 in mind!

- Notes:**
1. This checklist contains only last-minute, pre-evacuation actions; it in no way replaces the annual Wildfire Mitigation Checklist (available from many sources, including the Colo. St. Forest Service), which you should have finished before fire season began.
 2. Paper copies are available from Bill Sanders (PO Box 1490, Idaho Springs 80452). Free to GCCHLA members; \$1.00 each for all others. **Improvements welcomed at email above.**

Fire Evacuation Checklist

(Post on Door)

Last Name: _____ House Address: _____ Contact Info: _____

Locations: _____ Batteries
_____ Water sources
_____ Propane Tank _____ Tool shed
_____ Ladder(s) _____

When (or Before!) Fire First Starts

- If you haven't already done so, make a detailed inventory of personal items. Include purchase date & price, replacement cost, whether covered by insurance, etc. Store one copy off premises.
- Make a list of items to take either for use while gone or for safekeeping: papers (e.g., insurance, birth certificates, passports, & the inventory above), checkbook/credit card, ID, medicines, clothes, water, food, toiletries, pet supplies, etc.
- Review (or begin) the annual Wildfire Mitigation Checklist, particularly gutters, access, and defensible space.
- Fell any trees/limbs that you have been gambling on saving.
- Determine best radio news source on the fire. (Possibly K-Goat, particularly after the Saxon Mtn. upgrade.)
- Take "before" photos of inside and outside. Take the film with you when you leave.
- Make sure you have at least ½ tank of gas in the car(s) you will use to leave. Fill chain saw & pumps.
- Disconnect blockage of unidentified phone calls so that "Reverse-911" can be received.

1 Day Before Evacuation (if you have that much notice)

- Go over plans with family and close friend/relative not in fire area. Include rendez-vous point.
- If possible evacuate pets, livestock, and non-essential humans.
- Begin close checks on phone answering machine for reverse-911 notifications.
- If possible, get animals away from fire area.

6-12 Hours Before Evacuation (if you have that much notice)

- Fill water holding tank. Top off after significant use.
- Attach hoses to outside faucets. Charge, but keep nozzles shut. If roof is wood, attach one hose to sprinkler and place on roof (but do not turn on).
- Compose note to firefighters to place on front door. (Hand tools, chain saw, holding tank, cistern, etc.)
- Change into cotton or wool clothing (no nylon or combustible); put on sturdy footwear.
- Park all vehicles (a) out of way (garage preferable), (b) facing outward, (c) keys in ignition, (d) windows up.
- Disconnect electronic garage door opener (manual operation).
- Close exterior vents or cover with fire-retardant material (if none available, do nothing).

(over)

- Get combustible lawn furniture well away from structures.
- Begin loading car with valuables previously identified.
- Fill sinks, bathtubs, garbage pails, etc., with water. Place large towels, small rugs, burlap bags nearby.
- If applicable leave fueled portable pump next to cistern stream, or lake. (Make note to firefighters.)
- Round up all remaining pets (and their supplies) so that they can be evacuated immediately.

1-2 Hours Before Evacuation

- Shut off propane at the tank and at the house. Extinguish pilot lights.
- Erect ladder to roof (preferably away from fire direction. (Location: _____)
Place second ladder to deck, if applicable: (Location: _____)
- Remove (or at least open) combustible curtains; close fire-resistant curtains or venetian blinds.
- Move combustible furniture to center of rooms.
- Turn on light in every room and on porch.
- Close *every* window; close *every* door you're not actually using. Leave all unlocked.
- Top off water holding tank.
- Open fireplace damper, but place screen in front of hearth.

As You Leave

- Check doors (closed), windows (closed), lights (one on in every room).
- Place this checklist and any note in plastic bag and post where firefighters can see it.
- Drive away with headlights on. Follow evacuation route indicated; your favorite shortcut may have been affected by the fire or efforts to suppress it.

While You Are Gone

- Contact insurance agent(s) immediately. Tell them where you're staying.
- Keep *all* receipts. Don't determine by yourself what is, and isn't, covered.

When You Return

- Check phone, utilities, etc. Be sure pilot lights are lit before using gas appliances.
- Ventilate house if smoke in area is not too heavy. Unblock vents. Clean up fire retardant. If fire touched house, check roof and attic carefully.
- Inventory losses & report immediately. Use the "before" inventory as your starting point.
- Take "after" photos (before and after cleanup).
- If fire came close, watch for snags, hot spots, etc. and notify fire department *immediately*.
- Make any temporary repairs you can, particularly to reseal the outer shell from further damage. Do not wait for reimbursements to do so.
- Get a detailed estimate of repairs and forward to agent(s)/adjuster(s). One estimate is sufficient at this point.