

**Helena Community  
Citizen Evacuation Guide**

# **Evacuating To Safety**



A Wildfire Evacuation Guide for Residents and Visitors  
of Helena, Montana and Lewis and Clark County

January 2010

## Local Conditions

Tree mortality in the Montana National Forest has grown significantly in the past few years primarily due to the pine bark beetle infestation and a continued and persistent drought. Many Montana residents live in and among these trees. The fear of fire grows with each year that passes. With that we hold our breath as each day passes hoping the big one doesn't come. If that big one does start are we prepared enough to survive? Your local emergency responders are concerned about this and are working to increase life safety. They are working to mitigate the effects of this emergency, and are preparing for the cascading events of a wildfire. They are also pre-planning response strategies to secondary events such as evacuations and other emergencies.

Even with all of the mitigation efforts underway, the risk of uncontrolled wildfire is at historical proportions.



**Prepare Now!**  
**Evacuate Early!**  
**Evacuate Safely!**

# What you can do

Take personal responsibility for your own safety:

1. Develop an Evacuation Plan
2. Assemble an Evacuation Kit
3. Develop a Neighborhood Network
4. Practice your Evacuation Plan
5. Stay Informed
6. Evacuate when told to do so

**Prepare Now!**



**Evacuate Early!**



**Evacuate Safely!**

# 1. Develop an Evacuation Plan

Your Evacuation Plan should be simple enough to be followed when under stress, detailed enough to cover these key elements and understood by everyone.

- ✓ Identify your evacuation routes:
  - At least two ways out of your neighborhood

***The evacuation routes determined by authorities will be dependent upon many factors including which way the wildfire is moving.***

- ✓ Identify when you will evacuate:

Typically you should evacuate when you:

  - Become aware of an approaching wildfire
  - Feel threatened
  - When public safety officials advise you to leave the area

***Keep in mind that wildfires in the South Hills may quickly threaten your HOME and your way out.***

When time allows, evacuation orders will be provided by your local Disaster and Emergency services through the local Radio Stations.

Keep your car fuel tank at least ½ full at all times and be sure your vehicle is in good working order at all times.

- ✓ Identify shut-off valves for:
  - Electricity – Leave electricity on to power well pumps and porch lights.
  - Gas
  - Water
  - LPG or propane

- ✓ Identify a family meeting place

A family meeting place should be someplace that is:

  - A temporary place to assemble before moving on to an evacuation center
  - Safely outside of the evacuation area
  - Doesn't interfere with emergency response activities
  - Easily traveled to by family members

***Remember family members may be coming from different locations such as work, school, appointments, home or other locations. If unable to reach home, all family members must have a place to meet and regroup.***

✓ Identify Evacuation Center Locations

***Evacuation Center Locations will be determined by public safety officials and the American Red Cross at the time of the evacuation. Evacuation Center locations will be based upon the location of the wildfire, evacuation routes used and numbers of evacuees anticipated.***

Evacuation Centers used for wildfires typically include those located at the Fairgrounds, YMCA Parking Lot, and or the Department of Transportation Parking Lot. Center locations will be announced on public radio at the time of the fire.

✓ Identify an Out of Area Emergency Contact

- Someone out of the telephone area code or out of State
- Available to receive calls and pass messages
- Everyone needs to know the contact's phone number
- Cordless phones will not work in a power outage; always maintain an older style plug in telephone.

***During a major emergency or disaster, local telephone circuits may become over loaded whereas long distance circuits remain accessible. Identify a relative or friend who lives out of the area (out of the area code or even out of state) who can be used to check in with or pass messages back and forth to your immediate family members that may have gotten separated from you during the evacuation.***

✓ Special Considerations for Evacuations and Care of:

- Children and Infants
- Elderly
- Dependent Adults
- Persons with Special Needs such as medical and mental special care
- Pets, Livestock and Horses

***Special needs populations require special evacuation assistance. Special needs populations are those persons that cannot evacuate themselves without assistance. Don't rely on public safety agencies to evacuate you, your family or pets and livestock. Work with your neighbors to develop the assistance that you or they may need during an evacuation. Identify those living alone or those needing special assistance and plan today how you will evacuate them during an emergency.***

## 2. Develop an Evacuation Kit

***An evacuation kit should be readily available and visible at all times, updated frequently and located near the front door of your house or in your car.***

Items to include in your Evacuation Kit include:

- Copy of your Evacuation Plan
- Evacuation map and local area map
- Important family documents and telephone numbers
- Prescription medicines and eyeglasses
- First Aid kit
- At least one change of clothing, pillow and blankets
- Flashlight with extra batteries
- Hygiene supplies
- Entertainment material for all family members
- Food and water for all family members
- Cash and coin for emergency purchases
- Extra set of car keys
- Special items for infant, children, elderly or those with special needs
- Safety glasses or goggles, and bandana for blowing wind and fire embers
- Emergency tools including work gloves, sturdy shoes, and battery operated radio
- Essential valuables
- Cell phone and charger

## 3. Develop a Neighborhood Network

Work with neighbors to identify:

- People with special needs
- People who need transportation to the evacuation center
- Work with neighbors to coordinate the evacuation of pets, livestock and horses.
- Work with neighbors to identify utilities that may require shutting down in your absence.
- Work with neighbors to identify those protective actions that are required around your home when wildfire approaches.
- Work with neighbors to develop a neighborhood communication plan, which includes a telephone notification tree to notify others in case of emergency or evacuation.

***You may not always be at home during times of wildfire. You need your neighbors to help protect your family, pets, livestock and house in your absence!***

## 4. Practice your Evacuation Plan

- Quiz your children periodically so they remember what to do in case of wildfire.
- Conduct regular fire and emergency drills.

- Drive evacuation routes so you remain familiar with emergency travel routes and road conditions.
- Maintain your evacuation kit with fresh batteries, food, water and important family documents.
- Be sure that all visitors and guests know and understand your evacuation plan and evacuation routes.

***Practice, practice, and practice. Repetition breeds the automatic response you will need when having to act under stress during emergencies.***

## 5. Stay Informed

- Current Weather (hotter and drier it is the more prepared you should be)

Local Weather Service Information

Telephone: (406) 443-5151

Web Link: <http://forecast.weather.gov/MapClick.php?zoneid=MTZ014&zflg>

- Emergency plans and preparations. (Do not call 911)

Call your local Disaster and Emergency Services or Fire Department

Helena Fire Dept. <http://www.ci.helena.mt.us/departments/fire-department>

Lewis and Clark County 447-8252 or 447-8225

Jefferson County 225-4035

## Dial 9-1-1 for Emergencies only

## 6. Evacuate when told to do so

***Evacuate immediately if told to do so! Evacuate when you become aware of an approaching wildfire. Evacuate if you feel threatened. Evacuate before it becomes too late!***

- Listen to your car radio or battery-powered radio and follow the instructions of local emergency officials.
- Park your vehicle facing outward and place your keys in the ignition.
- Locate all family members and pets to prepare for evacuation.
- Prepare livestock and horses for transportation.
- Wear protective clothing and sturdy shoes. Wear 100% cotton clothing to include long sleeve shirt, long pants and hat. Have goggles available in case of winds or flying fire embers and a dry bandana or handkerchief to cover your mouth and nose.
- Place your evacuation kit in your car.
- Place a ladder outside for roof access for firefighters.
- Place a connected garden hose and buckets full of water around the outside of the house.

- Assemble firefighting tools near the house, including: shovel, rake, hoe, etc.
- Move propane BBQ appliances away from structures.
- Remove all combustible material such as lawn and patio furniture, doormats and decorations from around the perimeter of your house.
- Remove combustible window furnishings from around all windows.
- Leave lights on in the house and doors unlocked.
- Leave windows closed and heating/air conditioning off.

## The Evacuation Process

**Officials will determine the areas to be evacuated and the routes to use depending upon the fire's location, fire behavior, wind, terrain, etc.**

- Law enforcement agencies are typically responsible for enforcing an evacuation order. Follow their directions promptly and exactly!
- You will be advised of potential evacuations as early as possible. You must take the initiative to stay informed and aware.
- Listen to your radio/TV and for announcements from law enforcement and emergency personnel.
- You may be directed to a temporary assembly area off the mountain to await transfer to an evacuation center.
- When heavy smoke reduces visibility, movement may be restricted only to escorted convoys.
- Always drive cautiously!

## Returning Home

**Officials will determine when it is safe for you to return to your home. This will be done as soon as possible with primary consideration given safety and accessibility.**

- Local officials will follow a Re-Entry Plan in working towards getting you back into your neighborhood.
- This will typically take place when it is safe for you, safe for emergency personnel, safe for utility workers and routes are open and accessible.
- Prior to re-entry utilities will need to be repaired and in service, sewer and sanitation will need to be repaired, running water will need to be available and essential services will need to be available such as gas, medical services and food.

These things take time. **BE PATIENT**. The safety of you and the safety of emergency service personnel are the priority. When you do return home:

- Be alert for downed power lines and other hazards.
- Check propane tanks, regulators, and lines before turning gas on.
- Check your residence carefully for hidden embers or smoldering fires.
- Contact your insurance company if you have suffered loss or damage.



# When A Wildfire Approaches

- Park vehicles facing out with windows rolled up and keys in the ignition.
- Place your evacuation kit and important valuables in your vehicle.
- Prepare children and elderly family members for evacuation.
- Secure pets and livestock and prepare them for evacuation.
- Close shutters, windows, fireplace dampers and turn off heating and air conditioning.
- Remove combustible window coverings from windows.
- Remove any last minute combustible items such as lawn furniture, newspapers or doormats away from your home.
- Leave electricity on and leave inside lights on.
- Leave exterior porch lights on.
- Place a garden hose and buckets full of water around your house.
- Place aluminum ground ladders outside your house for firefighting use.
- Cover up by wearing 100% cotton long pants, long sleeved shirt, goggles, hat and bandana for your face.
- Notify your out of area contact of your intended evacuation destination.
- Leave a note attached to your front door for neighbors and public safety officials advising of your evacuation destination and telephone number if available.
- Evacuate when wildfire approaches, you feel threatened, or directed by public safety officials.

# If You Become Trapped

## While in your vehicle:

- Stay Calm.
- Park your vehicle in an area clear of vegetation.
- Close all vehicle windows and vents.
- Turn air conditioning to “max” mode, or “re-circulate”.
- Cover yourself with wool or 100% cotton blanket or jacket.
- Lie on vehicle floor.
- Keep your vehicle running with your headlights on.
- Use your cell phone to call 9-1-1 and notify officials of your situation and location.

## While on foot:

- Stay calm.
- Go to an area clear of vegetation, a ditch or depression if possible.
- Lie face down.
- Cover mouth and nose and cover up your body with cotton clothing or a large cotton coat or blanket.
- Use your cell phone to call 9-1-1 and notify officials of your situation and location.

## While at home:

- Stay calm.
- Keep your family together.
- Call 9-1-1 to notify officials of your situation and location.
- Fill sinks and tubs with cold water.
- Keep doors and windows closed, but unlocked.
- Stay inside your house.
- Stay away from outside walls and windows.
- If your house catches fire, move to the far end of the house and close windows and inside doors to restrict the spread of the fire. When it is safe to do so, exit your house and move to a “blackened” area of your property or neighborhood that has already burned. It is safer to be in an area that has already burned than an area not yet burned.

***It will get hot in the house, but this is much safer than being outside and exposed to flames and dangerous fire gases.***

## After the fire passes:

- Check your family and neighbors.
- Check roof and exterior of house for fire.
- Check under decks and inside attic for fire.
- Check your yard for burning trees, woodpiles (between pieces of firewood), etc.
- Extinguish embers and sparks.
- Continue to check for fires, embers and sparks for at least 12 to 24 hours after the fire has passed.

# MY EVACUATION PLAN

## Evacuation Routes out of my neighborhood

Primary:

\_\_\_\_\_

Alternate:

\_\_\_\_\_

## Evacuation Routes off the mountain

If wildfire approaches from the North:

\_\_\_\_\_

If wildfire approaches from the South:

\_\_\_\_\_

If wildfire approaches from the East:

\_\_\_\_\_

If wildfire approaches from the West:

\_\_\_\_\_

## Designated Family Meeting Place (outside evacuation area)

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

## Evacuation Tasks (identify family member assigned to each task)

Ready exterior of house for evacuation  
(combustibles, propane, hose, water, ladders)

\_\_\_\_\_

Ready interior of house for evacuation  
(windows, window furnishings, air conditioning)

\_\_\_\_\_

Ready vehicle for evacuation

\_\_\_\_\_

Ready evacuation kit and important valuables

\_\_\_\_\_

Ready pets and livestock for evacuation

\_\_\_\_\_

Ready children and elderly members for evacuation

\_\_\_\_\_

Leave note for neighbors and public safety officials

\_\_\_\_\_

# IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

## Emergency 9-1-1

### Out of Area Emergency Contact

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

### Neighborhood Contact for Evacuation Assistance

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

### Children's Schools & Childcare

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

### Veterinary & Animal Boarding Services

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Helena Fire Dept: 406-447-8472

Lewis and Clark Sherriff: 406-447-8293

Helena Police Dept: 406-442-3233

Jefferson County Sherriff: 406-225-4075

St Peters Hospital: 406-442-2480

Disaster and Emergency Services: 406-447-8285 or 8225

