



FORESTRY DIVISION



FIREWISE USA™
RESIDENTS REDUCING WILDFIRE RISKS

FIREWISE

Call (501) 580-9607 with any questions or email Firewise@agriculture.arkansas.gov

- **The Firewise USA program is a wildfire safety, education, and prevention program partnered with the Arkansas Department of Agriculture's Forestry Division.** It is one of the most successful chapters in the United States, thanks to funding from the U.S. Forest Service, assistance from Forestry Division staff and hard working volunteers. The Forestry Division has worked with more than 300 communities and all the state parks. We help tailor prevention and education efforts to the wildfire needs of each area of the state.
- **Individuals, communities, and fire departments benefit from the offered training, education, and resources.**
- **The main messages are:**
 - Homeowners should create defensible space (area directly surrounding structures) so homes are more easily protected from wildfire.
 - Defensible space is: **lean, clean, and green.** A **lean** space has mowed, short grass; trees trimmed of branches six feet from the ground; and maintained landscaping that does not touch roofs or windows. A **clean** space is cleared of debris such as vehicles, yard toys, tools, and other material that could be flammable. A **green** space is free of dead vegetation including leaves, pine needles, sticks and twigs. Aim to have a home surrounded by only healthy, live vegetation because it is less flammable than dead, dry debris.
 - Defensible space acts as a barrier between homes and forested or wildland areas. Consider anything that could transfer fire between homes and surrounding vegetation a wildfire hazard.
- **The primary objectives of the Forestry Division are:**
 - Educate homeowners about the importance of defensible space.
 - Train and educate fire departments and communities about how to prevent wildfires and wildfire damage.
 - Work with communities throughout Arkansas on their Firewise USA education needs.
 - Manage the grant funds and paperwork associated with recognizing participating Firewise USA sites.
- **What can the Firewise USA program do for your community?**
 - Wildfire education for community groups and fire department training sessions. Safety fairs, luncheons, youth rallies, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and other youth groups, volunteer events, clubs, and conventions (no matter how big or small) are excellent opportunities to request informational presentations at no cost. Free newsletters, literature, and programs are available to any civic group or fire department.
 - Fire departments have the greatest incentive to be involved with the Firewise USA program. Being a recognized Firewise USA site helps with ISO ratings, educates about specific wildfire risks of individual houses in the district – and provides grant money, training and support. These grants are only offered to fire departments. A total of \$3,500 is available during the first year and an additional \$1000 renewal grant is available each year after. Firewise USA recognition requirements include completing risk assessment surveys on 80% of homes in the district, hosting a fire safety education event for the community, completing a vegetation removal project on a home or civic space, and developing a Community Wildfire Preparedness Plan. Forestry Division staff members can help with all steps of the grant process.

The Arkansas Department of Agriculture's Forestry Division offers its programs to all eligible persons regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, age or disability and is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

Frequently Asked Questions

- **How do we start the grant process?**

Schedule a presentation. Presentations can be on a regularly scheduled training night, during a lunch, or any convenient time and location for you. Call 501-580-9607 or e-mail your request to firewise@agriculture.arkansas.gov. The initial presentation provides you with an overview of the program and the Risk Assessment Training provides attendees with two hours of Arkansas Fire Academy credit.

- **What can we purchase with our grant money?**

The first \$1,000 received for completing risk assessments can be spent how the fire department personnel sees fit (as long as money is spent on the fire department). The remaining \$2,500 must be spent on wildfire equipment to aid with mitigation goals. A list of equipment is available at www.aad.arkansas.gov/arkansas-firewise1, or email Leslie.foster@agriculture.arkansas.gov for a copy. The Greenbrier Forestry Division office must receive receipts for the purchase of this equipment. The \$1,000 renewal grants can be spent as needed in support of wildfire mitigation efforts.

- **What paperwork is involved?**

To receive funds, volunteer time totals and other forms must be completed along with pictures and submitted to the Greenbrier Forestry Division office. Staff members are happy to help you in completing each of these forms. Forms are available on the website and can also be mailed or emailed to you.

- **How often do the risk assessment surveys have to be completed?**

Once a fire department completes risk assessment surveys on 80% of homes in the wildland/urban interface, these surveys must be updated every *five years*.

- **Do crew members have to assess homes that are dangerous?**

It is not the desire of the Firewise USA program to endanger the lives of anyone. If homeowners are unfriendly or if an area is dangerous to visitors, we do not require you to survey the area – simply skip that residence and continue with others.

- **When is the deadline for finishing the program?**

There is no deadline to finish program requirements during the first year. Risk assessments, vegetation removal projects and wildfire education projects can take as long as you need during your initial recognition process. ***An October 1st deadline is in place for all renewals.*** The second year you are in the program, and beyond, you must have all renewal requirements completed by October 1 in order to receive a renewal grant.

- **Who can help with the recognition process?**

Anyone in your community can help with program requirements. Civic clubs, church groups, and the like, are excellent sources of volunteers and can help with education and vegetation removal projects. Invite residents to the Risk Assessment Training so they can help with wildfire surveys. You can include these same residents in completing vegetation removal projects and/or anything related to wildfire training and safety in your area. We encourage local student clubs, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts to participate.

- **How does our fire department get recognized?**

Once the requirements are met and all paperwork is turned in to the Greenbrier office and processed, Forestry Division staff members can provide or arrange newspaper coverage, town meetings, area-specific literature and/or flyers for any event or project that your department would like to host at no charge. Contact the Greenbrier Forestry Division office to discuss your community's needs.