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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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### Jasper Fire Department Continues Firewise USA® Wildfire Risk Reduction Efforts

**JASPER, AR.** — Firewise USA® is a nationwide initiative that encourages local fire departments and community members to take action in protecting their homes against the threat of wildfire. Through education and vegetation removal efforts, fire personnel and local citizens can work together to strengthen wildfire preparation in their community. Jasper Fire Department began participating in the Firewise USA® program in 2017 and has since invested more than 1,100 hours in risk reduction activities within their fire district. Said efforts have also earned the department \$5,500 in grant funding from the Arkansas Department of Agriculture's Forestry Division, the state partner to the National Fire Protection Association's (NFPA) national program. These grants are used to better equip the fire department with wildland firefighting/mitigation tools and support their yearly risk reduction efforts required by the Firewise USA® program.

The primary mission of the Firewise USA® initiative is to improve a community's defensible space, or the area closest to homes (up to 300 feet from structures) that should be treated for wildfire-resistance. Jasper crew members are also looking to educate community members on Firewise USA® goals and principles, distributing fire safety information at various events. The Forestry Division encourages citizens to be informed and to get involved in local fire prevention efforts.

So, what are the primary wildfire concerns for residents in the Jasper Fire District and Newton County— and very importantly, what can homeowners do to help firefighters make homes safer?

- **Spacing between Vegetation and Homes:** The area up to 300 feet from homes should contain lean, clean, and green vegetation of all kinds – this includes landscaping, grass, trees, and shrubbery. Homeowners primary focus should be directed to the Immediate Zone (0-5 feet from the home). Keep grass mowed short and provide water, making it very resistant to fire embers. Trim trees so limbs do not touch the roof, windows, or deck areas; also work to keep limbs trimmed at least six feet up from the ground so that a small surface fire is not transferred to treetops. Finally, keep dead vegetation like leaves, twigs, and pine needles cleared from the roof, porches, vents, and structure walls. These dead plant materials spread flames between vegetation and homes.
- **Think of the yard as the primary defense against wildfire:** Any debris, trees, vehicles, fences, workshops, doghouses, RVs, barns, or otherwise that could carry wildfire from the surrounding wildland area to your home should be considered a hazard. Any cleared area that could be used to stop a fire is helpful.
- **Wildfire always runs quicker uphill:** Wildfire will use slopes to build energy and burn through fuel faster. This doesn't mean people should fear living on hills. It means more effort should be focused on maintaining lean, clean, and green space on downhill slopes, as these are the areas most prone to rapid wildfire behavior.
- **Be mindful of burn bans and high fire weather:** Though it's not always convenient for homeowners during burn bans, they are declared by county judges when conditions are too dangerous to burn. Firefighters encourage residents to stay informed about burn bans via radio announcements, television, or by visiting [arkfireinfo.org](http://arkfireinfo.org) for an up-to-date statewide map of burn bans. Additionally, it's important to remember that even without burn bans, when winds are high and humidity is low, burning is still very dangerous. Don't leave

trash, leaves, or brush unattended while burning at any point, but especially when the weather is ripe for high wildfire danger.

- **Mailbox Lettering:** It's easy enough for firefighters to find a home when smoke is billowing from all sides, however, it becomes very difficult to locate emergencies and possible victims in the middle of the night or during rain when nature has no way of pinpointing a scene. While everyone understands posting reflective letters may take some time, firefighters encourage everyone to get correct addresses posted in four-inch letters as soon as possible to allow for the quickest possible response time.

The leading causes of wildfire in Arkansas are burning debris and arson. Debris fires include a broad list of accidents related to trash, brush pile, and leaf burns, while arson fires are those lit intentionally. Homeowners often light fires when conditions are too windy, during burn bans, or in areas that are not appropriately separated from the surrounding wildland area. Firefighters hope homeowners begin to make informed decisions about using fire and encourage residents to call anytime they hope to burn so that should a situation change, fire trucks can arrive quickly.

Many times homeowners take for granted that a fire department could save every home from fire; this is not a reality. What is a reality, however, is that residents can take active steps to ensure that their home could be saved in the event of a wildfire by keeping defensible space maintained and accessible to fire crews.

The Jasper Fire Department and the Arkansas Department of Agriculture hope to support you in all efforts to reduce wildfire risk. Call 501-813-2554 for more information about Firewise USA®, or visit the website at [www.aad.arkansas.gov/arkansas-firewise1](http://www.aad.arkansas.gov/arkansas-firewise1). Any citizen looking to learn more about Jasper's local program efforts can also contact the fire department. All community members are encouraged to be involved in their local Firewise USA® activities. Every hour invested by volunteers helps meet yearly renewal requirements and supports the continued success of the program.

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**FIREWISE USA™**  
Residents reducing wildfire risks