

# Campground Safety

Tips for Keeping Campers and Staff Safe



It is not a question if, but when, the next wildland fire will occur. Take steps to prepare ahead of time to reduce the risk wildland fire may pose to your campground.

## Maintain Defensible Space Around Campsites

Defensible space is the area between the structure or camper and the more densely vegetated area that creates a buffer to slow or halt the spread of a wildland fire. Maintaining this space can help protect your campground and campers.

Create and maintain distances of cleared vegetation between the more densely vegetated areas and campsites. Regularly remove any leaf or needle debris that collects throughout your campsites to a distance of at least 100 feet. Keep all vegetation trimmed back and grasses short in the campsites as much as possible.

## Establish Evacuation Plans

Wildland fires will behave differently based on weather conditions, so it's important to have more than one plan in place. Work with local fire personnel to create multiple evacuation plans that accommodate for fires beginning in different locations. Ensure that each plan accounts for evacuation of not only the campers, but also your staff and any necessary equipment. Your plans should include maps with site references or landmarks. They should also identify all potential hazards, special considerations, and areas of importance fire personnel and camp staff should be aware of. Review these plans annually and update them to reflect any changes to equipment or the physical grounds of the campsites. Make sure all of your staff members are aware of the evacuation plans and are ready and able to carry them out.

Post copies of the completed evacuation plans at all communal areas - bathrooms, lakes, etc. Make sure to give campers a physical copy of the evacuation plans when they check in and make this information available on your website.

Ensure evacuation plans are known by staff and posted in multiple locations for campers to be aware and find in the event of an emergency. Make sure campers are aware of this information and how they can contact staff in the event of an emergency.

## Campfires

Consider establishing fire pits at all of your campsites. Providing a fire pit that has already been dug out and surrounded by a metal ring or large rocks can help prevent campers from choosing to start fires in less suitable locations. If you provide metal rings that can be easily moved to accommodate different camper's needs, check the campsites between visitors and ensure the ring is moved back to an appropriate location before new campers arrive.

Regularly clear and maintain the campsite and manage the vegetation that may be near the campfire location. Keeping campsites with fire rings maintained will help keep the fire contained to the established area and less likely for a wildland fire to occur.

Provide campers with campfire safety reminders when they check-in and keep information posted on your website.

Good campfire safety reminders are to:

- Always check fire conditions before starting a campfire
- Comply with local Fire Restrictions or Burn Bans
- Always properly extinguish a campfire
- Ensure a campfire is never left unattended

Keep campers informed of current fire conditions and any bans on the use of campfires or camping stoves.

## Consider Conducting Fire Drills

Practicing evacuation plans when there is no real threat gives you an opportunity to identify and change any plans that do not allow for a quick departure from the campground. It also allows you to identify which plans may no longer work due to changes in the physical environment.

Involve your local fire department early and utilize their expertise to create an evacuation and response plan. Ensure they have maps and know of all potential hazards, special considerations, and areas of importance. Once a collective plan has been developed with the local fire department, share the plan with staff and fire personnel.

Staff members who have practiced their own role in the evacuation will be better prepared to help campers who need help evacuating from their campsites. If campers are also included in the drills, they will know ahead of time what is expected of them in the event of a wildland fire.

## Have a Plan to Account for the Campers

You will need to develop a plan to account for your campers in the event of an evacuation. By collecting and utilizing information from registered campers, you will enable camp staff to be more prepared to assist campers in the event of an emergency.

If you do not have registered information on the number of campers on site, ask staff who monitor the campsites to make daily checks on active campsites and note the following:

- Campsite number
- Number of vehicles and license plates of all vehicles
- Number of people
- Special considerations for elderly or disabled campers

Having this information creates situational awareness among staff. They'll be able to better manage those within their areas of responsibility and prepare plans in the event of an emergency.

## If an Evacuation Occurs

Consider daily how local fire conditions could potentially impact your campground, and if an evacuation may need to occur. Inform your staff if you feel there is potential for an evacuation of your campground so they can begin to prepare campers and equipment ahead of time. Keeping campers informed of potential evacuations allows them to prepare their own campsites for a quick departure and can help the evacuation process run smoother.

Contact local emergency departments when you decide that you will need to evacuate. Inform them of how many people you believe are staying at your campground and what campsites they would be occupying.

### Campground Safety Checklist

- Do we have pre-established fire pits at each campsite?
- Do we have campfire safety tips available to hand out when new campers check in?
- Do we have a system in place to inform campers of current fire conditions?
- Do we have updated evacuation plans that account for wildland fires in various locations?
- Are all staff members aware of our evacuation plans and their roles in the event of an evacuation?
- Have we prepared fliers with the evacuation plans to be handed out at registration?
- Do each of our staff members carry emergency communication equipment (cell phones, radios, etc.)?
- Do we have a plan to account for our staff members and campers in the event of an emergency evacuation?
- Do we have a plan for telling people when it's safe to come back?
- Have we posted all of our safety information on our website? (campfire safety tips, evacuation plans, etc.)