



# Preparing for a Wildfire in the Strathcona Regional District



The purpose of this document from the Strathcona Regional District's Emergency Program (SEP) is to help you to prepare your household, protect your property, and understand what to do if a wildfire is close to your community.

*Last Update April 2024*

**Table of Contents**

**BEFORE A WILDFIRE**..... 4

- Make an emergency plan for your household..... 4
- Build Your Grab-and-Go Bags..... 4
- Sign up for Alertable..... 4
- Insurance Coverage..... 5
- FireSmart Your Home ..... 5
- Know Your Evacuation Stages ..... 5
- Your Personal Safety ..... 6

**DURING A WILDFIRE**..... 6

- Information ..... 6
- BC Wildfire Service ..... 7
- Alert Types in Alertable..... 8
- Issuing Alerts in Alertable ..... 8
- How do I get notified about an Evacuation Alert or Evacuation Order?..... 9
- How is a decision made to issue an Evacuation Alert or Order? ..... 9
- Please follow instructions..... 9
- Transportation..... 9
- Reception Centres ..... 10
- Emergency Support Services (ESS)..... 10
- How do I connect with Emergency Support Services?..... 11
- Livestock and pets ..... 11
- Risks and dangers of not evacuating..... 11
- Wildfire Smoke..... 11

**AFTER A WILDFIRE** ..... 12

- Evacuation Rescind ..... 12
- Re-entering:..... 12
- Food and water safety:..... 12
- Starting the insurance claim process ..... 12

**Appendix** ..... 13

- Grab-and-go bag basic list..... 13
- Signing up for Alertable ..... 13
- Example of an Alertable App Notification..... 14

What do in an Evacuation Alert..... 14

What to do in an Evacuation Order ..... 15

Example of an Evacuation Order issued by the Peace River Regional District. .... 16

Example of Evacuation Map issued by the Shuswap Emergency Program ..... 17

Household Preparedness Resources ..... 17

Community Group Email Lists..... 17

FireSmart Resources..... 18

Wildfire Smoke..... 18

Cleaning/Removing Wild Land Fire Retardant Products from Surfaces ..... 21

Insurance Bureau of Canada – Insurance During Wildfires ..... 22

Evacuation Checklist – Preparing for a Wildfire Evacuation ..... 23

Concept of a Neighbourhood Level FRS Communications Net..... 24

## **BEFORE A WILDFIRE**

### ***Make an emergency plan for your household***

An emergency plan is a playbook for how you and the people you live with respond to disasters, including wildfires. Knowing what to do will reduce anxiety and help keep you focused and safe.

Start by downloading a fill-in-the-blanks emergency plan from [PreparedBC.ca/EmergencyPlans](https://PreparedBC.ca/EmergencyPlans) or email [preparedness@srd.ca](mailto:preparedness@srd.ca) to have physical copies mailed to you.

Add important information and details on how you'll communicate and connect with loved ones, particularly if you become separated. When you're done, make copies for your grab-and-go bags at home, at work and in your vehicle.

### ***Build Your Grab-and-Go Bags***

A grab-and-go bag is a small emergency kit that's easy to take with you, in case you need to leave right away. In the event of a wildfire, you may need to leave home quickly. Take time now to build a grab-and-go bag for everyone in your home.

Start with the basic list provided then consider the additional needs of your household. Do you have pets? Do you have young children? If yes, prepare and customize bags specific to their needs. See the list basic list of items in the Appendix.

### ***Sign up for Alertable***

Alertable is the Strathcona Regional District's emergency mass notification service. The service is free but you must be signed up to receive alerts. Alertable keeps residents, visitors, and businesses informed of emergencies in a timely manner and informs you about steps that can be taken to protect yourself and your loved ones. Alerts can be received text message, email notification, push notification via the Alertable app, and voice calls to landlines and cell phones. In addition to other options such as Google Play and Alexa.

Note: Alertable is different than the province's mass alerting system, *AlertReady*. Depending on the severity of an emergency, you may also receive a notification via the AlertReady.

For more information on Alertable such as how to sign up and examples see the Appendix.

## **Insurance Coverage**

Call your insurance representative to discuss your coverage or contact the Insurance Bureau of Canada at 1-844-227-5422.

If you leave your home due to a mandatory evacuation order, most homeowners and tenants insurance policies may provide coverage for reasonable living expenses for a specified time.

We are including this statement from the Insurance Bureau of Canada: *The purpose of insurance is to protect you from unforeseen events. It is important to have coverage year-round, and not wait for events to occur before trying to secure insurance protection for your home and property. Insurance companies may initiate temporary limitations on the sale of **new** policies in areas under imminent threat. These limitations can also include deductible changes, alterations to insured limits, and major changes to existing policies.*

For automobile insurance through ICBC, if you're placed on evacuation alert or ordered to evacuate, you won't be able to purchase new comprehensive or specified perils coverage until the alert or order has been lifted or you have moved your vehicle from the designated evacuation order or alert zone.

Contact your insurance broker for more details.

For more information on insurance during a wildfire see the Appendix.

## **FireSmart Your Home**

Mitigate wildfire risks around your home and property by undertaking FireSmart activities. Simple measures, such as focusing on FireSmart's three Home Ignition Zones, can make a significant difference to the survivability of structures by decreasing the intensity of a wildfire and slowing its spread.

Contact the Strathcona Regional District's Wildfire Risk Reduction Coordinator at for a free FireSmart Home Assessment email [wrr@srd.ca](mailto:wrr@srd.ca) or call 250-914-9234.

For more information on FireSmart visit [www.firesmartbc.ca](http://www.firesmartbc.ca) or see the Appendix.

## **Know Your Evacuation Stages: Alert, Order, and Rescind**

**Evacuation Alert:** Be ready to leave on short notice.

Organize your belongings, pack clothing, toiletries, and medications for several days, also pack your emergency plan, important documents (i.e. insurance), personal valuables, and mementos.

For more details on what to do during an evacuation alert see the Appendix.

**Evacuation Order:** You are at risk and must leave the area IMMEDIATELY.

Follow the directions contained in the order and evacuate using the route(s) that has been identified.

For more details on what to do during an evacuation order and an example of an Evacuation Order issued by the Peace River Regional District see the appendix.

**Evacuation Rescind:** The threat to life and safety has passed, you can return home.

### *Your Personal Safety*

If you feel your personal safety is threatened or require additional time evacuating don't wait for an evacuation order to be issued.

## DURING A WILDFIRE

### *Information*

Know where to find trusted information. If a wildfire is threatening your community, the best information sources are directly from your local authority such as:

- Alertable
- Facebook: Strathcona Emergency Program page  
[www.facebook.com/StrathconaEP](http://www.facebook.com/StrathconaEP)
- Instagram @sep\_epc

To receive Alertable messages from the Strathcona Regional District you must sign up in advance at [www.srd.ca/alerts](http://www.srd.ca/alerts)

### *Alert Types in Alertable*

**Critical Alerts (Red)** provide necessary information when there is an immediate and threatening danger. Some criteria include a significant threat to people, the risk is immediate, the alert can provide critical or life-saving information. Examples include an Evacuation Order or active-shooter.

**Advisory Alerts (Yellow)** provide information to the public to help prepare for a possible emergency or other event that could affect life safety. Examples include Evacuation Alerts or incoming extreme weather events. This might include the same types of events that would result in a Critical Alert but an Advisory might be sent beforehand to prepare, or after when there is important response and recovery information.

**Information Alerts (Green)** provide general information or updates to non-life threatening events.

## BC Wildfire Service

The BC Wildfire Service is tasked with managing wildfires through a combination of wildfire prevention, mitigation, and suppression strategies, on both Crown and private lands outside of organized areas such as municipalities or regional districts. BC Wildfire uses the following stages of control to report progress on wildfires: Out of Control, Being Held, Under Control, and Out.

Definitions	
Out of Control	At this stage, the wildfire is continuing to spread and is not responding to suppression efforts. In this case, BC Wildfire Service applies more aggressive suppression and control methods such as establishing control lines, burn-offs, dropping water, foam or retardant.
Being Held	At this stage, the wildfire is not likely to spread beyond predetermined boundaries under prevailing conditions. At this point, crews may finish establishing control lines, conduct fuel management activities and mop-up (extinguishing a fire after it has been brought under control).
Under Control	At this stage, suppression efforts have ensured the wildfire will not spread any further. BC Wildfire Service may continue to patrol the fire and extinguish hot-spots while moving gear, equipment and personnel to another incident.
Out	At this stage, suppression efforts are complete. The wildfire is extinguished. Once a fire is out, rehabilitation and recovery begin, which involves activities such as re-seeding areas with grass and rebuilding fences. Additionally, BC Wildfire Service conducts an after-action review which helps the organization continually improve response.

It is important to note all new wildfires are initially classified as Out of Control.

For remote wildfires, that pose no threat to public safety, property, or other values, may be allowed to burn to achieve ecological or resource management objectives.

For the most up to date wildfire information download the BC Wildfire App or contact Coastal Fire Centre's Information Officer via the public information line 250-951-4209 or email [BCWS.COFCInformationOfficer@gov.bc.ca](mailto:BCWS.COFCInformationOfficer@gov.bc.ca)

## ***Alerting when a wildfire is NOT impacting property or infrastructure***

SRD emergency personnel rarely receive any advance notice or call about a wildfire that are not directly impacting people, property or infrastructure. We are instructed by BC Wildfire Service to 'check the app' to become aware of wildfires in the same way the general public is instructed to do so.

If your local fire department has not been tasked by BC Wildfire Service to assist them with a wildfire, they are not given any 'inside information' either.

If the Strathcona Emergency Program (SEP) becomes aware of a wildfire near a community that is ***not*** a threat to people, property, or infrastructure (i.e. not an emergency) an Advisory (yellow) alert **may be** sent to notify residents depending on the proximity of the wildfire to households. Further updates will be provided through Information (green) alerts and emails to 'Community Group Email lists'. During 'non-impactful' wildfires, the SEP will **try** to provide one Information Update per day (email and Alertrable App). Unless the event escalates or protective actions (you need to do something) are required, you will only receive Information Updates (not Advisory or Critical Alerts).

The mandate of BC Wildfire Service is to function as an emergency response organization. Therefore, depending on the scope of wildfire activity the SEP cannot promise regular updates about a wildfire that BC Wildfire Services deems is ***not*** a threat to people, property, or infrastructure (i.e. not an emergency).

For more information about Community Group Email lists see the Appendix.

## ***Alerting when a wildfire IS impacting people, property or infrastructure (or has the future potential to cause this direct impact)***

If a wildfire is or has the strong potential to directly impact people, property or infrastructure the Strathcona Regional District will activate an Emergency Operation Centre, which is a streamlined organizational model of the British Columbia Emergency Management System that prioritizes critical processes for crisis and emergency response.

All alerts will be sent out as Advisory (yellow) or Critical (red) meaning your phone will ring and you will receive text messages.

Wildfires that are a threat to people, property, or infrastructure may likely require an Evacuation Alert or Evacuation Order to be issued.

## ***How do I get notified about an Evacuation Alert or Evacuation Order?***

If you have signed up for Alertable, you will be notified of Evacuation Alerts and Evacuation Orders via the Critical (red) alert function. If time permits, the RCMP will go door-to-door and hand-deliver notices. RCMP have the authority to callout Search and Rescue volunteers to assist them with this task. For an example of an Evacuation Order issued by the Peace River Regional District see the Appendix.

## ***How is a decision made to issue an Evacuation Alert or Evacuation Order?***

- The Authority Having Jurisdiction (Local Government or First Nation) will make the decision to issue Evacuation Alerts or Evacuation Orders under the authority of the *Emergency & Disaster Management Act*.
- The Emergency Operation Centre will work with the BC Wildfire Service to make decisions about Evacuation Alerts and Evacuation Orders.
- The BC Wildfire Service monitors current fire behaviours, forecasted fire behaviours, and weather and provides recommendations based on these factors.
- The most important consideration for making decisions is public safety and wildfire activity.
- The experts at BC Wildfire Service assess the safety of the region based on fire activity, weather, road access, and a variety of other factors. Their expertise keeps citizens safe.

See the Appendix for an example evacuation map issued by the Shuswap Emergency Program.

## ***Please Follow Instructions***

Please follow all evacuation alerts and evacuation orders and instructions from the Emergency Operation Centre.

## ***Transportation***

If don't have your own transportation to evacuate, inform emergency personnel and arrangements can be made to use commercial transportation such as BC Transit. A best practice is to talk to your friends, neighbours, and family members beforehand about carpool options.

## ***Reception Centres***

A reception centre is a safe space that may open during an emergency. At a reception centre you can receive information about the emergency, register with Emergency Support Services, get referred to supports, help with finding and re-uniting with family, and advice on recovery.

## ***Emergency Support Services (ESS)***

Emergency Support Services (ESS) provides short-term basic support to people impacted by disasters. If you're evacuated from your primary residence due to a disaster, ESS may be available for up to 72 hours (or longer) depending on your needs. Services can include food, lodging, clothing, emotional support, and information updates. Services are provided by professional volunteers under the Public Safety Lifeline Volunteer Program.

Support Details and Amounts:

- Food
  - Restaurant meals (up to \$53/per person/per day) OR Groceries (\$22.50/per person/per day) for the entire duration of support.
- Accommodation
  - Commercial (hotel, motel, campground – room charge only)
  - Billeting in a private home (\$30 per night based on single occupancy. Additional \$10/night for each additional person)
  - Group Lodging (a cot or air mattress in a community)
- Clothing and Incidentals
  - \$200 per person

Commercial accommodation vacancy during wildfire season is low and we cannot guarantee that there are enough ESS volunteers available for the long-term activation of a Group Lodging Facility. It is strongly encouraged that you make previous arrangements with friends, colleagues, or family members to stay with them during an evacuation.

It is important to note that ESS is not intended to cover all your expenses if you evacuate, only your basic needs. The role of insurance is to cover all your expenses. Check with your insurance provider about the availability of Additional Living Expense Insurance which covers additional costs incurred if a homeowner is displaced and must pay out of pocket as a result.

Additional supports may be available through organizations such as the Canadian Red Cross, however this is handled on a case-by-case basis and should not be relied on.

## ***How do I connect with Emergency Support Services?***

If you are unable to visit a Reception Centre to register, you can register with ESS over the phone. ESS is a provincial program that can be accessed from anywhere should you choose to evacuate somewhere outside of the Strathcona Regional District. Please call the professionally trained ESS volunteers at **(250) 203-1972**. If someone does not answer, leave a message and they will return your call at their earliest convenience.

## ***Livestock and pets***

We encourage you to take all animals with you when you evacuate. Emergency Support Services (ESS) tries to accommodate all pets at ESS Facilities. ESS and other agencies will try to make arrangements to feed and water all animals. Best practice – move livestock and pets out of the area when an Evacuation Alert is issued.

## ***Risks and dangers of not evacuating***

You may be reluctant to leave your home and community, however choosing to remain in an area that is under an Evacuation Order puts yourself, your family, and first responders in danger:

- Evacuation routes can change or become impassable.
- Services utilities, and businesses that you rely on daily may be shut down.
- Help may not be able to reach an evacuated area because of a risk to their own safety or access is blocked.

## ***Wildfire Smoke***

Wildfire smoke is a complex mixture of air pollutants and is an important health concern for the region. Reducing exposure to wildfire smoke protects your health. Smoke levels differ from place to place and can change quickly. Monitor the Air Quality Health Index through the provincial website below and Air Quality Alerts through Environment and Climate Change Canada. Wildland fire weather and smoke can also be monitored through FireSmoke Canada ([www.firesmoke.ca](http://www.firesmoke.ca))

Air Quality Health Index <https://www.env.gov.bc.ca/epd/bcairquality/data/aqhi-table.html>

For more information on wildfire smoke and the steps to take to best protect yourself see the Appendix.

## **AFTER A WILDFIRE**

### ***Evacuation Rescind***

Once officials determine the threat to life and safety has passed, the evacuation order will be rescinded, and you can return home. Continue to stay aware for other possible evacuation alerts or orders. A specific route or routes may be identified. Follow all directions and don't take shortcuts.

### ***Re-entering:***

- Wear thick gloves and thick-soled shoes to protect your hands and feet.
- Walk around the perimeter, checking for electrical wires, a gas smell, or debris that could fall.
- Enter with caution.
- Only use generator outdoors; do not connect to a domestic circuit.
- Do not use your sewage disposal system unless you know it's capable of handling waste.

### ***Food and water safety:***

- Water: Do not drink, prepare food, or wash in water until officials indicate your water source is safe. Follow recommendations from your local health authority.
- Refrigerated food: Discard food that is spoiled, as well as food that has been stored in a refrigerator that has lost power, even if the power has been restored. When in doubt, throw it out.
- Frozen food: Discard food that's thawed. If your freezer has been exposed to fire or has been without power for more than 3 days, toss the contents.
- Canned food: Tinned goods should be safe, unless the can has bulged, rusted, or is badly dented. All undamaged canned goods should be washed and disinfected if they've been exposed to smoke. Food stored in glass jars exposed to heat should be thrown out as seals may have broken.

### ***Starting the insurance claim process***

- Call your insurance representative or company.
- List all damaged or destroyed items.
- Keep all receipts related to clean up and living expenses if you've been displaced.
- If you do not know the name of your insurer or insurance representative, contact the Insurance Bureau of Canada's Consumer Information Centre at 1-844-2ask-IBC

## Appendix

### Grab-and-go bag basic list

- Food (ready to eat)
- Water
- Phone charger and battery bank
- Small battery-powered or hand-crank radio
- Battery-powered or hand-crank flashlight
- Extra batteries
- Small first-aid kit and personal medications
- Personal toiletries and items such as an extra pair of glasses or contact lenses
- Copy of your emergency plan
- Copies of important documents such as insurance papers and identification
- Cash in small bills
- Local map with your family meeting place identified
- Seasonal clothing and an emergency blanket
- Pen and notepad
- Whistle



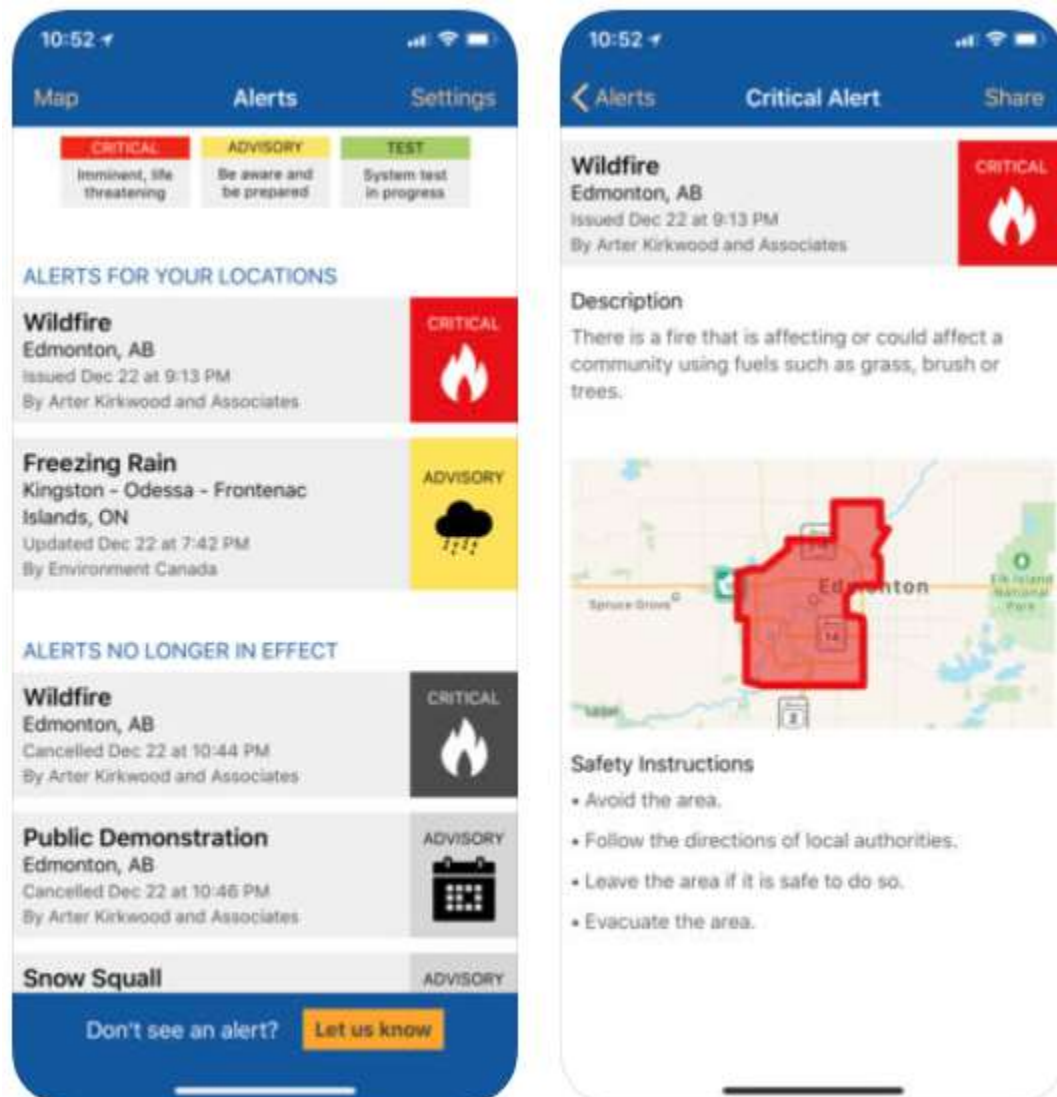
### Signing up for Alertable

Sign up for email and text alerts or phone calls at [www.srd.ca/alerts](http://www.srd.ca/alerts) or download the free Alertable app available for iOS and Android.

By creating an Alertable account and downloading the Alertable App you can also choose to receive notifications for over 50 other communities throughout BC as well as alerts from agencies such as Environment Canada and Drive BC.

It is important to know that if you have call control you will not receive the access code to sign up for phone alerts. You must temporarily turn off call control to receive the Alertable access code.

## Example of an Alertable App Notification



## What do in an Evacuation Alert

- Locate all family members and arrange for a place to meet outside of the evacuation area.
- Take photographs of your home and belongings for insurance purposes.
- Gather essential items such as medications, eyeglasses, valuable papers (i.e. insurance), immediate care needs for dependents and if you choose keepsakes (photographs, etc.), and have these items available for quick departure.
- Be ready to evacuate any family members with special needs and/or children.
- Make arrangements to move pets and livestock to a safe area.
  - *Best practice - move livestock, pets, and anyone who may require more time to evacuate out of the area when an Evacuation Alert is issued.*

- Make transportation arrangements in the event of an Evacuation Order.
- Ensure your vehicle has fuel. The tank should always be at least half full.
- Arrange accommodation for your family if possible. In the event of an evacuation, an Emergency Support Services (ESS) Reception Centre will be opened.
- Follow the best practices provided in the Wildfire Evacuation Checklist in this Appendix to protect your home and property from wildfire.

### ***What to do in an Evacuation Order***

- Leave immediately and do not return home until the Evacuation Order has been rescinded.
- Follow the directions from credible sources and evacuate using the route(s) that have been identified by emergency officials. Avoid shortcuts – they could lead to blocked or dangerous areas.
- Gather family members or go to your designated meeting area, identified in your family plan.
- Pets – take them with you; do not leave them behind. Take pets in a carrier or on a leash and remember their food and other care items. ESS will do their best to accommodate your pet at the ESS Group Lodging Shelter, but it is strongly encouraged you to go to a relative's or friend's home with your pet.
- Register with Emergency Support Services (ESS) to let your friends and family know you are safe. ESS can connect you with financial assistance for clothing, food, and accommodation.
- Take critical items, already packed in your emergency kit (medicine, purse, wallet, and keys).
- Close all doors and windows.
- Close and latch gates, but do not lock them.
- Take a cellphone, charger, and battery bank, if you have one.
- Contact your out-of-area emergency contact (identified in your personal emergency plan) to let them know what has happened, that you are alright and how to contact you. Alert them to any separated family members.

## Example of an Evacuation Order issued by the Peace River Regional District.



### EVACUATION ORDER #5

Stoddart Creek Wildfires

Electoral Area B

September 15, 2023 at 21:15

Pursuant to [Section 12 \(1\) of the BC Emergency Program Act](#), an **Evacuation Order** has been issued by Peace River Regional District due to immediate danger to life safety caused by wildfire. A map of the area can be found on the following page.

The Evacuation Order Area includes properties within the following areas:

- Following the southern boundary of Blueberry River First Nations reserve lands and the Blueberry River east to the bridge on the Prespatou Road,
- South along Prespatou Road to a point 3.2 km north of 264 Road
- Due west to a point 3.2 km east of the Beaton Airport Road
- Due north to a point of intersection with the Blueberry River
- And includes the following addresses:

13408 272 Rd	17483 Prespatou Rd	13368 272 Rd	17903 Prespatou Rd
13646 272 Rd	13769 272 Rd	12953 272 Rd	17493 279 Rd
12881 272 Rd	18354 277 Rd	13469 272 Rd	17773 Prespatou Rd
18183 Prespatou Rd	18352 277 Rd	17795 Prespatou Rd	17777 Prespatou Rd

### YOU MUST LEAVE THE AREA IMMEDIATELY

This does not affect First Nations communities or municipalities as they issue their own Evacuation Orders and Alerts.

#### WHAT YOU SHOULD DO:

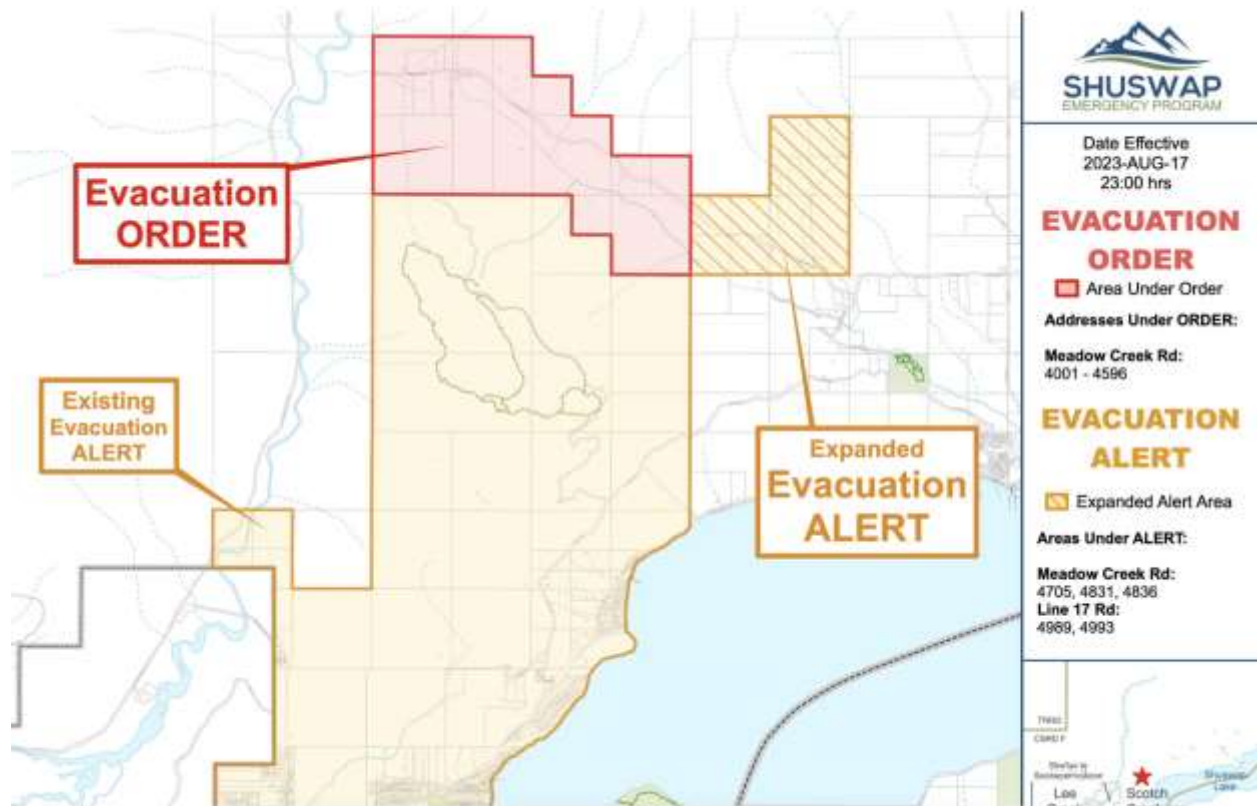
- Travel by safest route to Fort St John
- Register for Emergency Support Services (ESS):
  - at the **Reception Centre at North Peace Arena** - 9805 96 Avenue, Fort St. John, BC, or
  - by calling ESS at **250-794-3310**.
- The reception center will be open from the following hours:
  - **Friday September 15, 2023, from 21:30 hrs to 00:00 hrs (midnight)**
  - **Saturday September 16, 2023, from 09:30 hrs to 12:00 hrs**
- Please visit [prrd.bc.ca](http://prrd.bc.ca) and [BC Wildfire Service](#) regularly for current information
- If you need transportation assistance from the area, advise the person providing this notice or call 1-800-670-7773.
- Shut off all gas and electrical appliances, other than refrigerators and freezers.
- Close all windows and doors.
- Close gates (latch) but do not lock.
- Gather your family and, if you have room, take a neighbour or someone needing transportation. Do not use more vehicles than you have to.
- Take critical items (medicine, purse, wallet, cell & charger and keys) only if they are immediately available. Take pets in pet kennels or on leash.

Further information will be issued at [prrd.bc.ca](http://prrd.bc.ca) for more information.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Hiebert'.

Leonard Hiebert  
Chair, Peace River Regional District

## Example of Evacuation Map issued by the Shuswap Emergency Program



## Household Preparedness Resources

Visit [www.srd.ca/household-community-preparedness](http://www.srd.ca/household-community-preparedness) for additional resources such as:

- Household Emergency Preparedness Workbook
- Preparedness for People with Disabilities
- LIFE Kits
- Pet Preparedness

To learn more about community specific resources that may be available for your area of if you would like any of these resources mailed to you, please contact (250) 830-6702 or [preparedness@srd.ca](mailto:preparedness@srd.ca).

## Community Group Email Lists

The SEP maintains Community Group Email lists to send out various emails including weather alerts (rated significant, severe, or extreme), as well as upcoming training and events related to the emergency program. All group email lists are sent as BCC so information is kept confidential. If you would like to be added to a specific Community Group Email list please call 250-830-6702 or email [preparedness@srd.ca](mailto:preparedness@srd.ca).

## ***FireSmart Resources***

Visit [www.firesmartbc.ca/resources](http://www.firesmartbc.ca/resources) for additional resources such as:

- Home Ignition Zone Self-Assessment
- Guides & manuals
  - FireSmart Begins at Home Guide
  - FireSmart BC Landscaping Guide
- Videos
- FireSmart Research

Take the free, one-hour FireSmart 101 course <https://firesmart101.com/>

## ***Wildfire Smoke***

In most situations, staying home, and following these tips will give you the best protection from wildfire smoke.

- Monitor Alertable and Environment and Climate Change Canada if Air Quality Warnings are issued.
- Monitor the people around you for signs of illness and ensure everyone drinks plenty of water.
- Ensure friends, family, clients, and students with chronic health conditions (e.g. asthma) follow their care plan, have any necessary medications on hand and seek additional advice from their physician if needed.
- Reduce activity during periods of poor air quality, especially outdoors.
  - If breathing becomes difficult or uncomfortable, stop or reduce the activity.
- Consider keeping windows and doors closed during high smoke times, however, make sure that indoor temperature levels can be maintained at a comfortable level to prevent heat-related illnesses.
- Ensure filters are in good working order. Use the highest rated MERV filter possible (MERV 13 or higher).
- Consider using appropriately sized portable HEPA filters for individual rooms.
- Consider using a humidifier. It may help remove smoke from indoor air.
- While some respirators and facemasks can provide some protection if well-fitted, simple one-layer cloth masks/bandanas, gaiters etc. offer no protection whether wet or dry.



## Face Masks for Wildfire Smoke

The best way to protect your health from wildfire smoke is to seek cleaner air. Use a portable air cleaner at home, find an indoor environment with filtered air, or relocate to an area with less smoke. If you cannot access cleaner air, some face masks can provide protection from wildfire smoke. However, it is important to be aware of the limitations and potential risks.



**Well-fitted respirators offer the most effective protection from fine particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>).**

- Respirators are marked with letter and number combinations, such as N95, KN95, and KF94. These products are very similar, but the markings indicate different standards used to test them.
- A good fit is the most important thing for filtration of PM<sub>2.5</sub>. Inhaled air must pass through the material of the mask, not around it.
- A well-fitted respirator will reduce PM<sub>2.5</sub> concentrations by more than 90%.
- It can be difficult to get a good fit if the respirator is the wrong size or shape for your face, especially if you have a small face or facial hair.
- A 3-layer cloth or disposable mask provides moderate protection compared with a respirator.
- The effectiveness of 3-layer masks can be improved by following the same advice used for COVID-19 protection <https://u.nu/dwmi4>.
- Simple 1-layer cloth masks, bandanas, gaiters, scarves, or t-shirts offer no protection, whether wet or dry.



**If you chose to wear a respirator or mask for wildfire smoke, you should be aware of the limitations and potential risks.**

- It is NOT SAFE to wear any mask while sleeping.
- Most respirators and masks cannot protect against the gases in wildfire smoke, which may also cause irritation.
- Wearing a respirator or snugly-fitted mask may make breathing more difficult. Pregnant women and people with respiratory and cardiovascular conditions should talk to their health care providers before using masks for wildfire smoke.
- Respirators and snugly-fitted masks are uncomfortable to wear, especially when it is hot.
- Respirators and masks do not work against wildfire smoke when saturated with sweat or water.
- People with limited upper body mobility may need help putting respirators or masks on and taking them off.
- The fit of a respirator can be affected by physical activities such as bending or lifting, and should be re-checked often (see next page).
- Wearing a mask may lead to a false sense of security – listen to your body at all times and stop or reduce activities if you feel unwell.

## Respirators come in a wide range of shapes and sizes.



- If you are exposed to wildfire smoke while working, speak with your employer about respiratory protection.
- There are many new respirators available since the COVID-19 pandemic, and it can be difficult to spot counterfeit products.
- The US CDC has been testing different products and publishing the filtration efficiency results <https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehp/2020/2020-2021-0011.html>.
- All respirators have two straps – some go around the head and some hook behind the ears.
- Test different respirators **BEFORE** the wildfire season begins. Once you find a model that fits well, buy a few replacements.

### Steps for wearing a respirator properly:

Choose the right shape and size for your face. Many models come in multiple sizes, ranging from XS to XL.

If you are wearing glasses or a hat, take them off while you fit the respirator.

**1**

Put the respirator on and arrange the straps or ear loops. If the respirator has two straps, the top one should sit above your ears and the lower one should sit below your ears, as shown.



**2**

Mold the nose piece (usually a metal strip) around the bridge of your nose with both hands to create a snug fit.



**3**

Test the respirator for leaks by covering it with both hands. When you inhale, the material should pull in towards your face. When you exhale, you should not feel air escaping from around the edges. If air leaks in or out around the nose, re-mold the nosepiece. If air leaks in or out around the cheeks or chin, adjust the placement of the straps on your head or tighten the ear loops.



If you cannot get a good fit, consider asking someone for help or finding a different respirator that is better fitted to your face.

Store your respirator in a clean, sealed container with hard sides to make sure it does not get dirty, wet or bent out of shape.

Most respirators are disposable, but you can re-wear each one for wildfire smoke as long as it stays clean, dry, and well-fitted. Test the fit of your respirator each time you put it on.



BC Centre for Disease Control  
British Columbia Health Services Authority

LAST UPDATED: MAY 2021

FOR MORE INFORMATION: [bccdc.ca/wildfiresmoke](https://bccdc.ca/wildfiresmoke)

## ***Cleaning/Removing Wild Land Fire Retardant Products from Surfaces***

The following are suggestions for cleaning surfaces, such as buildings, homes and vehicles that have been coated with wild land fire retardant products:

- Start cleaning as soon as safety permits. The longer the retardant dries the more difficult it is to remove completely.
- For small and/or more sensitive surfaces, the use of warm water, mild detergent and a soft brush or cloth followed by a clean water rinse is recommended. A presoak can also be helpful in softening the dried material before brushing off.
- For larger surfaces, pressure washers have been used very effectively. Caution should be observed when using pressure washers on porous surfaces (e.g. stucco) – minimize the power of the spray so as not to loosen the stucco or drive retardant particles deeper into the surface.
- Each type of surface will have different characteristics and may be more or less difficult to clean. Surfaces that are porous such as concrete, stucco, and stone are often more difficult to clean. Smooth surfaces like glass, metal and hard plastic are often easier to clean.

Applied fire retardants do not pose a significant risk to humans, pets, wildfire, aquatic life, or plant life. Wet retardant and runoff may be slippery, exercise caution when walking in it. Runoff from cleaning operations will often retain a significant red colour. Avoid draining into ditches or streams that run into waterways.



## Insurance During Wildfires

During major wildfires, insurance companies may initiate temporary limitations on the sale of new policies in areas under imminent threat.

Consumers who want to change their coverage levels during a wildfire may face difficulties.

**However, renewals of existing policies will continue to take place, regardless of the wildfire threat.**

Many policies include a 'Declaration of Emergency Endorsement', which extends the expiration date of policies when an emergency is declared by government, and ensures that the existing policy stays in force until an emergency order is terminated.

It's important to remember that the purpose of insurance is to protect you from unforeseen events. It is important to have coverage year round, and not wait for wildfires to occur before trying to secure insurance protection for your home and property.

Some examples of the limitations/restrictions that may be put in place for areas facing a threat from wildfire include:

- New policies
- Deductible changes
- Alterations to insured limits
- Major changes to existing policies

Since these restrictions are temporary, they do ease as the threat decreases.

### Does a Provincial State of Emergency impact everyone's ability to obtain a new insurance policy?

No. If a "State of Emergency" is declared by the province, only the areas that are under imminent threat are commonly subject to temporary restrictions or limitations on the sale of new coverage.

#### If you are considering, or are in the process of buying, a new home in an area currently deemed at risk from wildfires:

- **Consider adding a condition 'subject to property insurance'** clause in the offer
- **See if you can delay the possession date**, until the threat passes and coverage can be placed on the policy
- **Shop around.** Insurers have different limitations/ restrictions for properties in threatened areas
- **Ask your broker or agent what options may be available** to secure insurance for the home
- **Ask if you can add the new home onto your existing policy**, instead of trying to secure a new insurance policy with a different provider.

### More insurance questions?

Call your insurance representative, visit [ibc.ca](http://ibc.ca) or contact IBC at **1-844-2ask-IBC** (1-844-227-5422)

**AskIBWest@ibc.ca** (Western & Pacific regions)  
**ONCIC@ibc.ca** (Ontario)  
**AtlanticCIC@ibc.ca** (Atlantic region)

© (2021) Insurance Bureau of Canada. All rights reserved. This document contains copyrighted material and is not to be modified, copied, reproduced in whole or in part, in any way, without the express written permission of Insurance Bureau of Canada. The content contained in this document is being provided for information purposes only.

[ibc.ca](http://ibc.ca)



## *Evacuation Checklist – Preparing for a Wildfire Evacuation*

# Evacuation Checklist – Preparing for a Wildfire Evacuation

When an evacuation is anticipated, follow this checklist to protect your home and property from wildfire (if there is time to do so). Monitor the fire situation and don't wait for an evacuation order if you feel threatened. **If ordered to evacuate, do so immediately.**

### **Inside the House**

- Gather your grab-and-go bags, emergency plan, copies of important documents and cherished mementos. Have them at the front door or already packed in your vehicle.
- Take down flammable curtains and window treatments.
- Move flammable furniture to the centre of the room, away from windows and doors.
- Disconnect automatic garage door openers so doors can be opened by hand if you lose power.
- Shut all windows, doors, and garage doors. Seal any gaps with duct tape.
- Turn off air conditioning, home water and electricity.
- Leave both interior and exterior lights on so your home is visible in heavy smoke.

### **Outside the House**

- Move combustible items (toys, patio furniture, cushions, firewood, door mats etc.) from on and under deck and move them into your home or garage, or at least 10m away from the house.
- Ensure your vehicle has fuel. The tank should always be at least half-full.
- Connect garden hoses and fill large containers with water, such as pools, hot tubs, and garbage cans. This can assist firefighters and help slow advancing flames.
- Ensure your property number is visible. This will help firefighters locate your home quickly.
- Shut off and move portable tank 10m away from structures. Remove weeds and other debris from areas around large stationary propane tanks so there is no combustible material near tank.
- If you have a combustible fence that attaches to your home: secure gate in an open position.
- Mow grass and weeds to 10 cm or less. Clear vegetation and debris within 10m of the home and near combustible fences.
- Check vents for screening and damage. Use duct or metal tape to temporarily cover damaged vents or those without 3mm screening.

### **Animals**

- Locate your pets and keep them nearby.
- Prepare farm animals for transport and think about moving them to a safe location early.

Do not shut off your natural gas.

Do not leave sprinklers on or water running, this can affect critical water pressure used for firefighting.

## ***Concept of a Neighbourhood Level FRS Communications Net***

A Family Radio Service (“walkie talkie”) radio can be used by anyone, no certification is required. This concept is especially useful in neighborhoods with large properties or limited cellphone reception. If your neighbor doesn’t have a phone, or doesn’t get reception, or they are out in the garden all day this can help spread the word about an emergency. But this concept only works if a neighborhood organizes, plans and exercises it prior to the emergency.

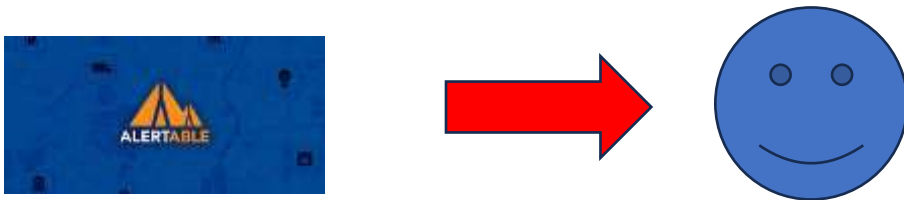
---

Step 1: Marley and his neighbors organize a Walkie-Talkie communications net with an agreed upon Channel ("Channel 2")



---

Step 2: Marley receives an Alert about a wildfire through Alertable



---

Step 3: Marley utilizes Channel 2 to notify his immediate neighbors who all have their Walkie-Talkies with them.

