



2022 National Fire Year Themes

The wildland fire community will safely manage wildfires during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- All wildland fire agencies remain committed to performing safe, effective wildfire management actions during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- During the 2020 fire year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in coordination with the wildland fire agencies, developed critical COVID-19 guidance for all wildland firefighters aimed at reducing exposure to the virus and thus, decreasing spread potential to firefighters and communities. This guidance reduced COVID-19 among wildland fire personnel and will continue again in 2022. This will allow wildland firefighters to continue wildfire management and perform essential fuels management activities.

Firefighter and public safety is always the highest priority during a wildfire.

- No amount of protection for a structure or resource is worth the loss of human life.
- With each new fire start, fire managers engage in a comprehensive risk analysis to identify the safest and most appropriate management actions. Firefighters may not directly engage a wildfire until risk is mitigated to an acceptable level.
- Use of unauthorized unmanned aerial systems (UAS), or drones, in a fire area endangers the lives of pilots and firefighters. Never fly unmanned aircraft over or near a fire. Know before you fly.
- Wildfires can produce high quantities of smoke. During wildfire activity, firefighters can do little to reduce smoke impacts. Affected communities should remain aware of smoke advisories and conditions. Learn more at airnow.gov.

Recreate responsibly: the public plays a valuable role in wildfire prevention.

- More than 95% of wildfires are contained in the first 24 hours of initial response, meaning tens of thousands of fires are extinguished before becoming large wildfires.
- On average, human-caused wildfires make up 87% of all wildfire occurrences annually. Many of these wildfires occur in proximity to roadways, communities and recreational areas, posing considerable threat to public safety.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, spending time outdoors has become more popular than ever. The Recreate Responsibly Coalition offers guidelines and tips for getting outside and staying healthy while practicing responsible outdoor recreation and wildfire prevention activities. Learn more at recreateresponsibly.org.

Fuels management can save lives, property and natural resources.

- Firefighters and land managers use fuels management, such as prescribed fire, mechanical thinning, biological treatments and chemical spraying to reduce vegetation buildup. These proactive management tools are used to protect communities and other values from future wildfires.
- Fire plays a natural role in ecosystem health and can serve as a land management tool. Wildland firefighters are trained to use wildfire and apply prescribed fires across the landscape when it is safe and reasonable.
- When safe to do so, wildland firefighters will manage naturally occurring wildfires to improve habitat and restore the ecological balance of natural landscapes.



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- Homeowners should take responsibility to reduce flammable material around homes and communities before a fire occurs, which can help keep the public, firefighters and property safe. Creating a buffer between homes and trees, shrubs, or other wildland areas is essential to improving a home's chance of surviving a wildfire. Not only does this space help slow or stop wildfire spread, it also provides a safe place for firefighters to defend homes if conditions allow.

Wildfire activity is becoming more extreme.

- Overall, wildfire activity is lasting longer and becoming more extreme – a trend resulting in the term “fire year,” which is used to define it as a year-round occurrence. The 2021 fire year proved what many wildland fire agencies have been experiencing for more than 20 years: wildland fire activity is occurring earlier in the spring, lasting longer into the fall, and involves more intense, difficult-to-control large wildfire activity.
- Wildfire activity over the last 10 years has been some of the most destructive in U.S. history: In 2021, more than 58,000 wildfires burned over 7.1 million acres throughout the country. Although this did not break records, homes were lost, private, federal and Tribal property was damaged, and infrastructure was affected in several states.
- Three times in the last 10 years, more than 10 million acres have burned throughout the country: in 2020, 2017, and 2015. In 2020, 10.1 million acres burned throughout the country, which set a record for acres burned since accurate recording and data gathering began in the 1980s.
- Between 1983 and 1992, wildfires burned an average of 2.7 million acres per year. The 10-year acres burned average is about 6.8 million acres per year – an increasing trend.
- Wildfire suppression costs are increasing. For example, suppression costs stayed below \$1 billion before the year 2000. Since 2010, wildfire suppression costs have risen beyond the \$1 billion mark consistently every year, with a record of more than \$3 billion set in 2018. While the number of wildfires and acres burned can vary, fire years are, on average, becoming longer, costlier and more complicated.
- Across the western United States, wildfire activity is starting earlier in the spring and lasting longer into the fall; above normal fire activity periods typically last 75 days longer than 40 years ago. In 2021, the nation spent a record-breaking high of 99 days at Preparedness Levels 4 and 5 – the highest levels of wildfire preparedness.

Supporting the wildland fire management workforce

- Wildland fire agencies are working to shift away from a predominantly seasonal firefighting workforce because firefighters are in demand throughout most of the year.
- Firefighters and wildland fire personnel are frequently called upon year-round to support national and international disaster response efforts.
- Longer, more intense fire years, and the need to actively manage and reduce fuels across a vast, more-flammable landscape, have increased pressure on the wildland fire workforce. Therefore, the federal wildland fire agencies continue their focus of providing mental health resources; ensuring career stability and upward mobility; striving for work-life balance; providing increased pay; and overall supporting wildland fire personnel who are the backbone of wildland fire management.