FIRESAFE STRUCTURES

When we think about having a home in a rural or forest area we tend to dream of a cedar shake chalet with a broad, open deck and a cozy fireplace, nestled among tall pines. To protect yourself from fire, this is not the type of structure and surroundings you want. However, if this is what you already have, you can still do a lot to make your home more "firewise."

Start With Design

Your home can be fire wise and still be attractive. Protective features such as smoke detectors, sprinkler systems, water taps and enclosed eaves are easy to add. If you are building or renovating, you and your architect or builder should talk to fire safety experts and have them review your plans.

Roofing

Roofs are the largest surface areas exposed to airborne sparks. Studies show that sparks setting fire to wood shake roofs are the major reason for home losses in rural and forest areas. The best roofing materials are those that have the best resistance to fire.

Metal, tile, and fiberglass roofing materials offer the best protection because they are not likely to catch fire.

Asphalt shingles and tarpaper are less protective because they are made of oil-based products, which can catch fire when exposed to enough heat.

Wood, such as cedar shakes, offers the least protection. The smallest spark can set fire to dry, sun-baked wooden shingles. Note: fire retardants are available, but must be applied at regular intervals. Follow the manufacturers recommendations.

Gutters

Metal gutters are the best. Wooden and plastic gutters can pose a hazard. All gutters must be cleaned out on a regular basis, if not airborne sparks can set fire to debris in them.

Outside Walls

Like roofs, walls should be built with fire-resistant materials. Stone, brick, and metal are the best; wood and vinyl give the least protection.

Foundations

The foundation area of a building is often the first area to come into contact with a spreading wildfire. Stone, brick, and cement are the materials to use here. A closed foundation, of cement block or stone, is safer than an open foundation.

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