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Planning + Preparing = Safety

Let's just say I recently experienced a close call. I was frozen in confusion, standing in our beloved tiny cabin, perplexed by what to grab during a short evacuation window as a fire was headed my way.

Experiences like this tend to realign our priorities and make us realize we are not well prepared. The information and resources are out there, but we think it will never happen to us so we don't bother with it.

According to [ready.gov](https://www.ready.gov):

- **Fire is FAST.** In less than 30 seconds a small flame can turn into a major fire. It only takes minutes for thick black smoke to fill a house or for it to be engulfed in flames.
- **Fire is HOT.** Heat is more threatening than flames. Room temperatures in a fire can be 100 degrees at floor level and rise to 600 degrees at eye level. Inhaling this super-hot air will scorch your lungs and melt clothes to your skin.
- **Fire is DARK.** Fire starts bright, but quickly produces black smoke and complete darkness.
- **Fire is DEADLY.** Smoke and toxic gases kill more people than flames do. Fire produces poisonous gases that make you disoriented and drowsy. Asphyxiation is the leading cause of fire deaths, exceeding burns by a 3-to-1 ratio.

Here are a few things to consider:

- Make digital copies of valuable documents and records like birth certificates and store them in a fireproof safe or with a trusted person away from your home.
- Sleep with your bedroom door closed.
- Keep a fire extinguisher in your kitchen.
- Consider installing an automatic fire sprinkler system in your residence.
- Find two ways to get out of each room in the event the primary way is blocked by fire or smoke.
- Make sure that windows are not stuck and screens can be taken out quickly.
- Practice feeling your way out of the house in the dark or with your eyes closed.
- Teach children not to hide from firefighters.

Many resources are available at [usfa.fema.gov](https://www.usfa.fema.gov) to help with things like home escape plans (all available in English or Spanish), kitchen fire safety, in-home sprinkler systems, fire safety for people with disabilities, grilling fire safety, psychological resources for firefighters, and so much more.

The Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN) provides not only home fire information, but also wildfire resources for those living or working in rural areas, including information on the

Firewise Program which recommends such techniques as creating defensible/defendable space around the home to prevent a passing wildfire from igniting the home or surrounding structures. Visit extensiondisaster.net.

As it turned out for me, the wind direction and dedicated rural fire department responders from several counties mitigated what would have been a heartbreaking scene. I discovered what was valuable to me...after the fact. I hope you discover and protect those things NOW.