

# Disaster Preparedness Checklist for Businesses & Nonprofits

## Wildfires



**A wildfire, or forest fire, is an uncontrolled fire that occurs where natural vegetation is the predominant ground cover.** These wildfires happen across the country, and although they usually occur in less developed, rural areas, they can also threaten communities and cities.

Impacts of a wildfire include direct property damage, cost of fire suppression, and damage to personal property and natural resources. The amount of potential damage and associated costs is directly related to the intensity and extent of the wildfire.

**Below is a checklist of ways to prepare your staff and business against the potential threats of a wildfire.** Consider planning now to avoid loss, possible damage, and unplanned costs associated with this type of disaster.

### Before the Onset of a Wildfire

- Keep an adequate number of appropriate fire extinguishers in strategic locations (such as near loading docks and waste collection areas) and maintain them properly.
- Train employees on how to use extinguishers correctly.
- Consider maintaining a water supply at your facility to control small fires until emergency personnel can arrive.
- You might install a water tank or install hoses and pumps to an existing pond, river, or lake. Be sure the hoses are long enough and inspect them regularly.
- If your business is located in an area subject to freezing temperatures, then be sure that water outlets and pumps are protected.
- Evaluate water levels in extreme hot and cold weather conditions.
- If your water pump uses electrical power, then consider obtaining a gasoline- or diesel-powered pump or generator in case electricity is cut off during a fire. However, be aware of the risk of storing a large quantity of fuel. Use an appropriate storage facility that is protected against vehicle impacts and fire.
- Have appropriate tools, such as rakes, axes, saws, buckets, and shovels, available to help control small fires while waiting for emergency personnel to arrive.
- Develop a written crisis management plan to discuss and provide to all employees.
- Conduct regular drills to remind and prepare employees for what to do during an emergency.
- When planning, consider and allow employees time to prepare and execute personal preparedness plans for their families.
- Identify crucial employees, and ensure they understand what is expected of them during a disaster. For example, employees responsible for IT functions may need to work during a disaster to protect and reestablish your technology systems.



Learn more at:  
[SBA.GOV/PREPARE](https://www.sba.gov/prepare)

- Develop a plan that allows your IT, payroll, benefits, and HR functions to continue to operate during and after a disaster if your workplace access is restricted.
- If employees must work remotely, then have the necessary equipment and support available to allow them to perform their duties.
- Consider making any travel, hotel, and meal arrangements in advance.
- Keep abreast of emergency warnings by having a weather alert radio and/or computer alert in the office.
- Regularly update your employees' emergency contact information.
- Review your insurance policy to understand what it covers and what it doesn't.
- Keep an adequate supply of water, nonperishable food, batteries, cleaning supplies, first aid supplies, other necessities, etc., on hand.

### **During a Wildfire**

- Go to a predesignated shelter area such as a safe room, basement, storm cellar, or the lowest building level. If there is no basement, then go to the center of an interior room on the lowest level (closet, interior hallway) away from corners, windows, doors, and outside walls. Put as many walls as possible between you and the outside. Get under a sturdy table and use your arms to protect your head and neck. Do not open windows. Evacuation orders will often be swift and accurate for affected areas. However, if unable to evacuate, then stay inside and away from outside walls. Close doors, but leave them unlocked in case firefighters require quick access into your area.
- If your office roof is accessible by ladder, prop it against the building so you and firefighters have access to the roof.
- Life safety is paramount.

- Mark your position clearly with anything that may signal rescue workers to your presence inside the building. This could be articles of clothing or bright colored material attached to the outside of your location.
- Close windows, vents, doors, blinds, etc. Shut off gas meters, pilot lights, and propane tanks. Turn on all lights in the building to increase visibility in heavy smoke.

### **After a Wildfire**

- Immediately check the roof, put out any fires, sparks, or embers (if accessible).
- If there is no power, then check to make sure the main breaker is on. Fires may cause breakers to trip. If the breakers are on and power is still not available, contact the utility company.
- ALWAYS call 911 if any danger is perceived upon re-entry and contact local experts before finally moving back in.
- Communication following a disaster is critical. So, establish a communication plan that works regardless of the nature of the disaster. Provide instructions on when, how, and the specific information to communicate.
- Consider setting up a toll-free number or website to communicate with employees and customers.
- If necessary, contact your insurance agent.

Already have a current SBA Physical Damage Disaster Assistance loan? Talk to your loan officer about increasing your loan by up to 20% for mitigation projects against future disasters.

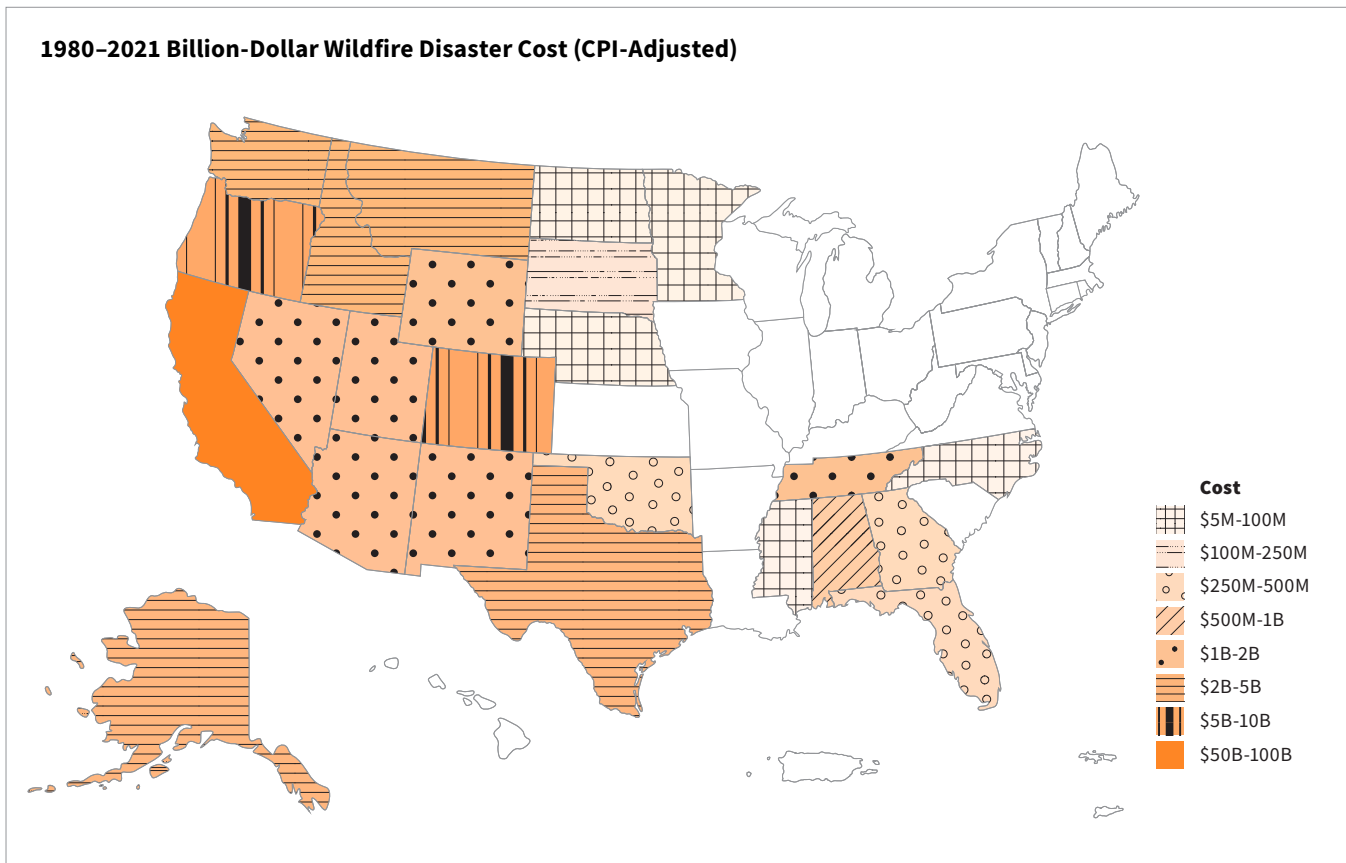
## Your Employees

- Train your employees in general fire safety, especially for tasks with a high fire risk, such as welding and cutting, fueling vehicles, working with flammable liquids, etc.
  - Teach employees about the importance of good housekeeping and grounds maintenance in preventing and controlling fires.
  - Have an adequate number of appropriate fire extinguishers and maintain them properly.
  - Train key employees in when and how to use fire extinguishers.
  - Consider when and how to evacuate employees if a wildfire threatens.
  - Establish an evacuation plan and keep it up to date.
  - Hold evacuation drills regularly so all employees know who is in charge and so that they become familiar with evacuation routes and routines.
  - Make sure all employees can get out of the building, find shelter, and communicate with a responsible person.
  - Plan primary and secondary exits from your buildings. Consider how employees will escape if doors or windows are blocked by an exterior fire.
- Plan two evacuation routes out of your neighborhood. Consider how employees will evacuate on foot if roads are closed or impossible to use, such as if they are blocked by emergency personnel.
  - Remember that ponds, lakes, rivers, and landscaping or swimming pools can serve as safety zones.
  - Keep appropriate emergency supplies on hand, including flashlights, battery-powered portable radio, extra batteries, first aid kit, manual can opener, non-perishable foods, and bottled water. If designated employees will be working to protect the property, then have appropriate clothing available, such as work boots and gloves, personal protective equipment, and sturdy work clothes.
  - Teach employees about wildfire risks and preparedness. Provide information to help employees protect their homes, too.
  - If you are located in a wildfire area, consider advising employees to keep personal disaster supplies and copies of important documents at work in case they need to evacuate from work without being able to get home.

For more information, examples of mitigation projects, additional checklists, and other resources, visit [sba.gov/mitigation](https://www.sba.gov/mitigation).

## U.S. map denoting frequency of billion-dollar wildfire events, 1980–2021.

A wildfire, or forest fire, is an uncontrolled fire that occurs where natural vegetation is the predominant ground cover. Though wildfires usually occur in less developed, rural areas, they can threaten urban environments if they are not brought under control, and they are geographically widespread.



**Summary:** From 1980–2021, there were 20 wildfire events with losses exceeding \$1 billion (CPI-Adjusted) each. *Please note that the map reflects a summation of billion-dollar events for each state affected (i.e., it does not mean that each state shown suffered at least \$1 billion in losses for each event).*

**Source:** NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information