

Fire Safety for Field Work

Fire hazard is especially high in California during the summer due to the long, dry season. Those who work at off-site research stations, do field work, or are simply enjoying some much needed time off outside will do well to observe the following simple measures for preventing and reacting to fires.

Vegetation near buildings



- Clean roof surfaces and gutters regularly.
- Keep trees pruned and away from the roof.
- Keep an area of 30 feet around buildings clear of weeds and brush. Stack firewood piles that far as well. This is called “defensible space.”

Combustibles

- Store gasoline (as well as paints, solvents, and other flammable liquids) outside the living quarters. Store only enough to meet your immediate needs and keep it away from any heat source or flame. Keep gasoline in an approved gasoline container, which has a flame arrestor on the spout. Be sure to replace the lid after each use.
- Do not smoke around gasoline.
- Always fuel engines and motors outside. Move 10 feet from fueling location to start engine.
- Cool motor before refueling.
- Use engines and motors during cooler times of day.



If possible, avoid using gasoline-powered engines and motors during times of poor air quality. The Bay Area Air Quality Management District announces Spare the Air days on radio and television. It asks area residents to refrain from lighting barbecues or using gasoline-powered motors or engines on those days. Other air quality management districts have similar provisions.

Campfire caution

- Consider using a camping or backpacking stove for cooking instead of a fire. If you must have a campfire, keep it small. A bed of coals or a small fire surrounded by rocks gives plenty of heat.
- Build your campfire away from overhanging branches, steep slopes, rotten stumps and logs, dry grass, and leaves. Pile wood away from the fire.
- Clear a three-foot-wide area around your campfire ring of litter, vegetation, and any other burnable material. This will keep a small campfire from spreading.
- Never leave a fire unattended.
- Be aware of the weather conditions. Wind can fan flames and carry embers.
- Keep water handy. Quick action can prevent a fire from spreading to the surrounding area.
- Make sure your campfire is completely out before you leave or go to sleep. Douse the embers with water, break them up, then douse them again.



If You're Caught in a Wildfire

If you're caught in a wildfire, the best strategy is to find shelter. Don't try to outrun the fire. If you can, get to the flanks or into a burned area. The next alternative is take temporary shelter where the vegetation is sparse (well-grazed pastures, open arenas, road cuts and banks, large boulders). Look for a depression in the ground and clear as much vegetation and flammable "ground litter" as you can. Then lie face down in the depression and cover yourself with anything that will shield you from the heat.

Avoid natural chimneys and topographic saddles. A natural chimney is a narrow, steep canyon that concentrates heat and updraft. Saddles between hills are wide natural paths for fire, winds, and vegetation; fires tend to be drawn up and over these depressions with great speed and intensity. Temperatures from a fire racing through these natural conditions can exceed several thousand degrees Fahrenheit and quickly use precious oxygen.

If you're in a vehicle, move it to bare ground or a sparsely vegetated area, close all windows and doors, lie on the floor, and cover yourself with a jacket or blanket. Keep calm, stay in the vehicle, and let the fire pass.

Additional resources

For more information on fire prevention and fire safety, contact the Office of Environment, Health & Safety at 642-3073.

