

Prepare for Wildfires

May is National Wildfire Awareness Month

By Joseph Hathaway

As Eastern Oregon enters another wildfire season, Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative members can take easy steps to prepare and plan ahead in case of an emergency.

Deciding what to do in an active evacuation scenario can be difficult, especially in OTEC's four-county service territory, where the threat of wildfires is present every year.

OTEC wants you to be prepared. The Federal Emergency Management Agency, [ready.gov](https://www.ready.gov) and other organizations offer the following tips:

Prepare Now

- Build a “ready-to-go” kit with emergency supplies such as food, water, first-aid kit and other items that would last for several days. You should also include N95-rated respirator masks. These masks filter out particles in the air you breathe. Keep in mind special needs of those in your household. Don't forget about pets.

- Sign up for your community's emergency notification system.

Baker County: public.alertsense.com/signup/?regionid=1357

Grant County: grantcountyoregon.net/198/Alertsense

Harney County: flashalertbend.net/?alert=1

Union County: union-county.org/

union-county-emergency-notification-system

- Stay tuned to national organizations such as the Emergency Alert System and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Weather Radio for emergency alerts.
- Scout several ways to leave your town or area. Drive the routes and become familiar with shelter locations. Have a plan for pets and livestock.
- Keep important documents in a fireproof safe.
- Review your insurance coverage to make sure it is adequate.
- Research and implement defense zones or defensible space to protect your home. Zone 1 is a 30-foot circle around your home that is free from leaves, debris and flammable materials.
- Trim branches that overhang the house, porch and deck. Prune branches of large trees at least 6 feet from the ground.
- Use fire-resistant materials when building, repairing or renovating your home.
- If you see trees or limbs touching power lines in any situation, stay away and report them to Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative immediately.

THREATENED BY WILDFIRE?

Local law enforcement orders evacuations, but there are steps you can take to prepare yourself and your family at each level of evacuation.

LEVEL 1: GET READY

Prepare yourself, monitor the situation, pack your important documents & valuables.



LEVEL 2: GET SET

Be set to evacuate at a moment's notice.



LEVEL 3: GO!

Leave immediately!



During a Wildfire

- If authorities say to evacuate, leave immediately.
- If trapped, call 911 and give your location.
- Listen to alerts for emergency information and instructions.

After a Fire

- Do not return home until authorities say it is safe to do so.
- Use caution when entering a home or building. Avoid all standing water, which may have an electrical charge.
- Check all utilities and electrical components. If you see damage outside your home—such as downed power lines or damaged power or gas lines—vacate the area and call 911 to have OTEC crews dispatched.
- If you detect electrical damage inside your home, hire a qualified electrician to make repairs.
- Check roofs and attics for hot spots or sparks, and extinguish them immediately. Continue to check for at least 24 hours.
- Fire near power lines creates additional hazards. If you see downed power lines, no matter the situation, always assume they are live and dangerous. Stay back and notify OTEC immediately. ■

For more information, go to otec.coop/wildfire-preparedness.