

Living With Fire

The most common ignition sources that determine whether a wildland fire will consume a structure are radiant heat and embers.

Flammable materials inside a window, especially curtains, that ignite from radiant heat are a common start.

Radiant heat can flash ignite an entire flammable wall from as far away as a hundred feet.

It's often fires inside a defensive perimeter started by blowing embers that provide the radiant heat to catch the house.

There's a great difference in the flammability of different types of vegetation. Pinion trees are very fire resistant. Junipers flash in a very hot fireball. Plant selection around your house has a lot to do with whether your house burns or stands.

Embers that blow up under the eaves are a common start. In 2003 in Southern California, in places where building codes dictated non-flammable stucco walls and red tile roofs, the wind blew embers up under the tiles onto the tar paper and plywood underneath.

If your escape route is not fire resistant, leave early or think twice about leaving. Many people die in their cars while trying to escape.

In grass, brush, and sparse forest, if the fire overruns you, shelter in the house till the fire goes by, then get in the black. In thick timber, don't be there.

Many years ago in Malibu, when the fire got to the ocean, and all the fire equipment was parked on the beach, I saw a photo of a small valley filled with multi-million dollar houses on small estates; all of them burnt to the ground, except for the big white house with a red tile roof surrounded by a big green lawn in the middle of the valley. He was an immigrant self made millionaire without a penny of fire insurance. Instead of spending his money on fire insurance, he spent it on fire proofing.