

For Immediate Release

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U.S. Fire Administration
Working for a fire-safe America

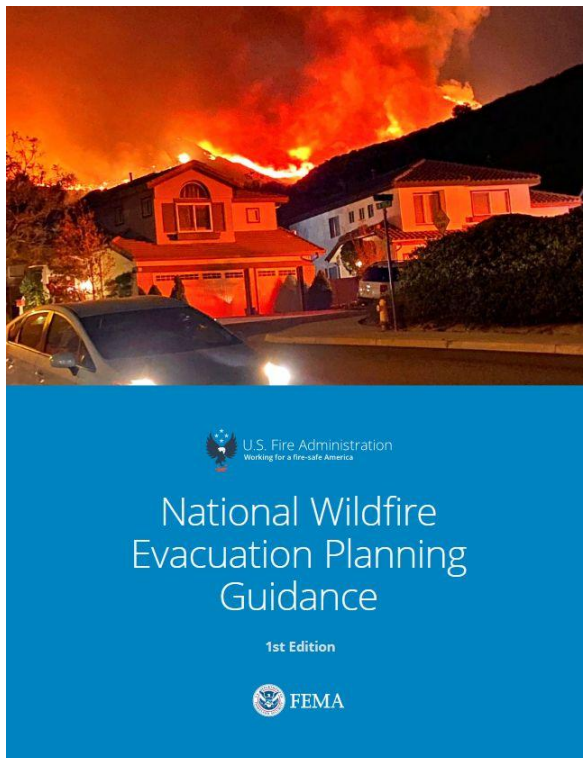


FEMA



U.S. Fire Administration Publishes National Wildfire Evacuation Planning Guidance: A Must-Have Resource for Wildfire Planners

Developed in partnership with FEMA and informed by wildfire evacuation exercises across the country, this new framework provides communities with flexible, evidence-based strategies for planning and executing wildfire evacuations.



Download Guide

July 8, 2026, Saratoga, CA—Santa Clara County FireSafe Council (SCCFSC) is pleased to make the just released National Wildfire Evacuation Planning Guide available to our newsletter subscribers. The Guide is designed to enhance public safety, encourage operational preparedness, and promote clear communication among agencies and the public. It offers actionable tools for pre-evacuation preparation, decision-making during evacuation events, and post-evacuation support. We encourage all communities—especially those in wildland-urban interface areas—to use this guidance as a starting point for creating and refining evacuation plans. Together, we can help ensure readiness and protect lives in the event of wildfire.

Insights from project participants include:

Dr. Lori Moore-Merrell, Former U.S. Fire Administrator:

"Wildfire evacuation planning is one of the most consequential — and often the most underdeveloped — pieces of community wildfire readiness. — minutes matter, and confusion can cost lives. This evacuation guidance provides fire departments, emergency managers, and local officials with a clear, evidence-based framework for planning and executing evacuations before disaster strikes. Every community in the wildland-urban interface should review the contents, exercise, and use this guide in their emergency plan."

Anthony Schultz, Director, Wildland Fire – Esri:

"Wildfire evacuation planning is a reality communities are facing across the country. The value of this guide is that it gives communities a practical, plain-language starting point for understanding evacuation, organizing partners, improving public awareness, and making better decisions before a fire begins. It aims to help communities that may not have deep technical resources or mature planning programs understand the process and move forward in a structured way. This was about giving people tools, a shared language, and confidence so they can better plan for wildfires within their communities".

Rebecca Harned, previously the Senior Advisor, US Fire Administration:

"Wildfires move fast, and effective evacuation planning cannot begin when smoke is already on the horizon. Careful planning before fire season is essential, and it must account for the unique risks, geography, and needs of each community. This Planning Guidance provides local leaders with a flexible, science-informed framework to strengthen evacuation preparedness, enhance coordination, and build more resilient communities before disaster strikes." Rebecca is now the Principal Research Scientist, UL Research Institutes.

Jeannette Sutton, Sociologist and Associate Professor, department of emergency management at the University at Albany and the Principal investigator of the FEMA IPAWS Message Design Dashboard:

"Plain language and message consistency are the two anchors necessary for effective public wildfire evacuation messaging. By drawing from the state of the art research on emergency alerting and wildfire risk communication, this guide clearly lays out a path to help the fire service to approach wildfire warnings supported by evidence. The importance of including the source, hazard, location, guidance, and time -and eliminating the use of jargon words - in every message cannot be understated. I'm thrilled to see this emphasized! "

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Seth Schalet, CEO, Santa Clara County FireSafe Council:

“Addressing the complex challenges in wildfire evacuations requires a multi-pronged approach and active engagement by all key stakeholders. It was an honor to be part of the guide’s development and member of the project’s Communications Working Group. Over the course of approximately 18 months, we met regularly to develop content, update and enhance how best to communicate all facets of evacuation. Wildfires are moving faster, burning hotter and becoming more destructive within the wildland urban interface. Effective evacuation guidance matters now more than ever.”

Mark Novak, Retired Fire Chief, Vail Fire and Emergency Services, and Chair of the IAFC Wildland Fire Policy Committee:

“The National Wildfire Evacuation Planning Guidance (NWEPG) represents the compilation of learning from actual wildfire evacuations, the input of evacuation subject matter experts and the lessons learned from evacuation exercises. Importantly, the NWEPG recognizes the many ways in which wildfire evacuations are unique, particularly in "no-notice" scenarios. The guidance also seeks to standardize evacuation terminology as well as incorporate the concepts from the NIST ESCAPE guidance.”

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About Santa Clara County FireSafe Council:

As 501 (c)3 nonprofit with a 25-year history, Santa Clara County FireSafe Council’s core mission is to mobilize the people of Santa Clara County to protect their homes, communities, and environment from wildfires. A trusted partner across the government, fire service, corporate and WUI residential communities, SCCFSC has led some of the most complex hazardous fuel reduction projects in the region With a board of directors and advisory board that has a deep expertise across the wildfire ecosystem including wildfire and environmental research, academia, emergency management, regional planning, technology solutions and wildland firefighting leadership, Santa Clara County FireSafe Council is uniquely positioned to lead cross-sector collaborations, government-private partnerships in Silicon Valley, Santa Clara County and beyond. For more information, visit <https://sccfiresafe.org/>

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