

Living and Working with
FIRE
in Valencia County



Belen Fire in the bosque, February 2007

Valencia County News Bulletin

A guide for our residents



See the back cover for new Open Burning rules

Understanding wildfire

Fires in Valencia County

When a big plume of smoke climbs into the sky one of two things is probably on fire: the dense cottonwood forests in the bosque, or grass and brush in more open terrain. Each has its own special dangers, especially when warm weather and spring winds arrive.



Stable Fire in the bosque, June 2010

Bosque fires

In the dense vegetation of the bosque fire can quickly climb from burning leaves on the ground to the tops of the highest trees. The leaves ignite shrubs, which then ignite leaves on the lower branches of the big trees. Soon there is a wall of flames fifty feet tall that can't be put out with water. Strong winds can push the flames from the canopy of one tree to those downwind.

The embers from bosque fires pose a threat to houses and other valuable property. Stopping a big bosque fire often requires cutting down trees in the path of the fire. Once the fire is contained, it can take many days put out all of the big, slow-burning timber left behind.

Grass and brush fires

A wind-driven fire in thick grass can spread faster than you can run. Because of this, grass fires are the most dangerous type of wildfire. A slight change in the direction of the wind will immediately affect which direction the fire spreads. An unpredictable fire like this is very dangerous for firefighters, residents and livestock. The thick smoke from a big grass fire can reduce visibility so much that you can't drive safely or even know where the fire is located.



Homestead Fire, December 2013

Grass and brush fires on our East and West Mesas are fast moving. They will often stop spreading when they reach a road, a plowed field or grass that has been sprayed with water. Escaped field fires in the valley that get out of control threaten many values and can extend into bosque.



Dangerous weather conditions can cause fire whirls to form. Like tornadoes, fire whirls vary in size – from less than one foot in diameter to several dozen feet wide.

Red Flag Warnings

You may hear on a radio or television that a Red Flag Warning has been issued. This occurs when the National Weather Service believes that there is a dangerous combination of high temperatures, low humidity and windy conditions that could cause fires to spread rapidly. On these days avoid burning and any outdoor activities that could create sparks. Remember to call before you burn to see if it is OK to burn.



What the fire danger colors mean

Low

Wildfires are not likely. Fires that do start will probably spread slowly and be easy to extinguish.

Moderate

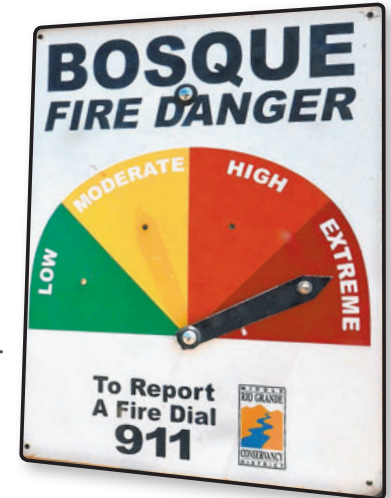
Some wildfires may be expected. Flame heights and rate of spread will be moderate. With sufficient personnel and equipment putting out the fire should not be difficult.

High

Wildfires are likely. Fires in dense brush or the bosque will be difficult to control under windy conditions. Fires can start easily from all causes and may spread quickly. Do not burn outdoors.

Extreme

Fires will start and spread rapidly. Every fire has the potential to become large.



Working safely

Sparks and hot materials are natural byproducts of welding, cutting, grinding and operating equipment. There is nothing wrong with these things unless they give birth to a brush fire. Here are some tips to keep that from happening.



Welding ~ Hot pieces of metal are easy to see when they are glowing, but stay hot enough to start a fire after they darken. Be sure that sparks can't get lodged in brush, hay, wood piles or soil that might be moist with fuel or oil.



Cutting ~ If you are cutting material that might contain nails make sure that the sparks will hit open ground away from brush or piles of sawdust.



Driving ~ When tires look like this they can become a fire hazard. Each year fires are started when very hot pieces of a disintegrating tire land in dry grass next to a road.



Parking ~ Where is the best place to park your cars and equipment? The answer is on concrete, dirt or gravel. This way any hot engine parts can't ignite tall grasses. Plus, your vehicles will be safe from a fast moving grass fire.

Burning safely



Burning brush ~ What are the two biggest mistakes you can make when burning brush?

- 1) Burning on a windy day
- 2) Walking away from the pile

Be smart. Always call before you burn. Stay with your burn and make sure it is out and cold before you leave it.



Wood stove ashes ~ Here is a recipe for the safe disposal of ashes:

- 1) Put ashes in a metal container
- 2) Add water and stir
- 3) Wait 2 days
- 4) Make sure the ashes are cool before you dump them in your yard



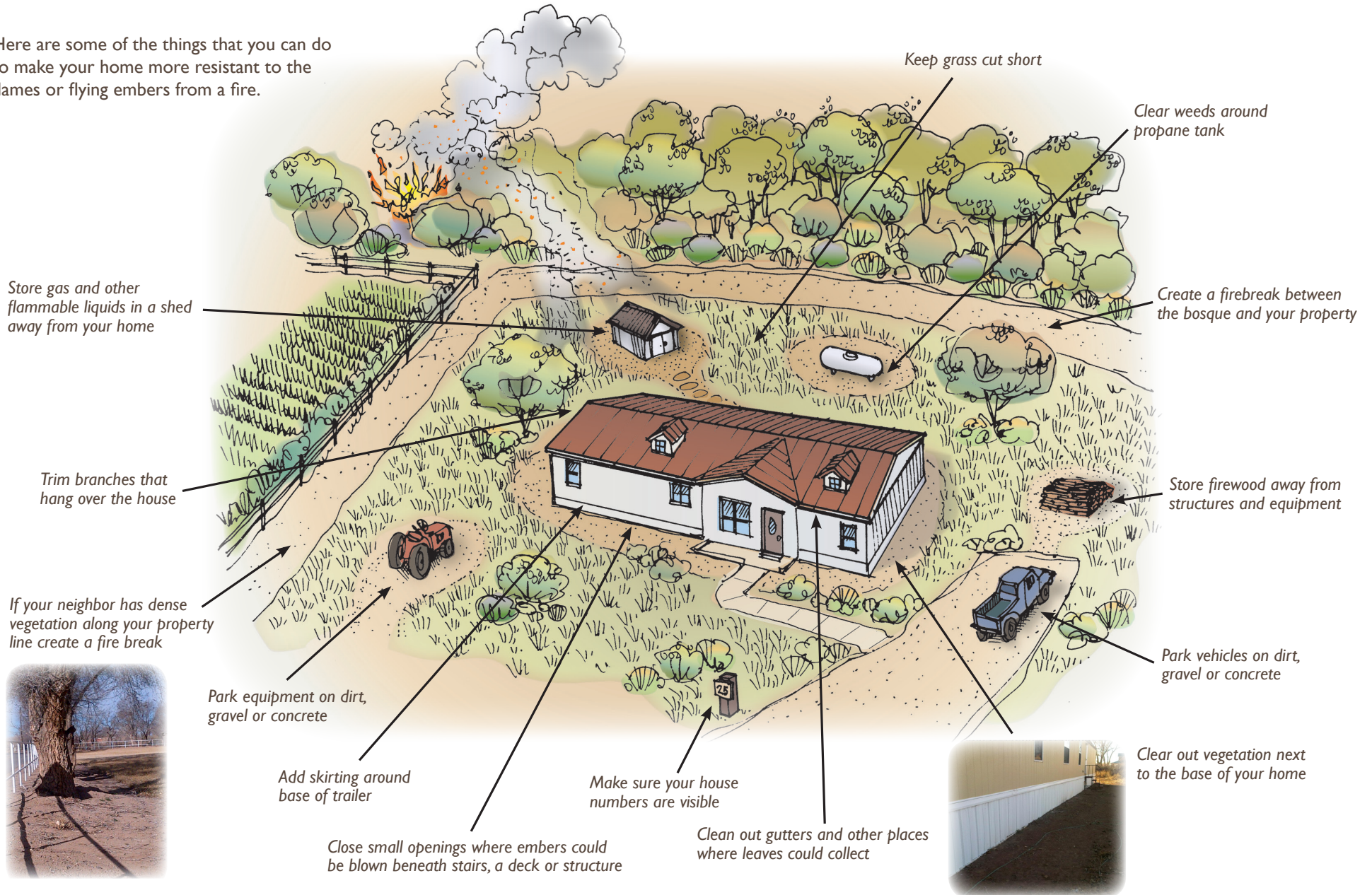
Controlled burns ~ When burning fields, ditch banks or fence lines, it is always safest to ignite the fire so that it can only burn against the direction of a very light breeze. Most fires escape because they are left unattended or the winds increase in speed or change direction.



Be sure you have enough people, equipment and water to put out the fire quickly if you need to.

Protecting your property

Here are some of the things that you can do to make your home more resistant to the flames or flying embers from a fire.



Evacuating safely

The evacuation route you use should be away from the fire and away from the direction that the fire is moving. Identify several different routes so that you can choose the safest one. Try to avoid narrow roads that could easily become blocked.

What to take ~ Here is an important thing that you can do before the wildfire season arrives: Make a list of things you want to take and know where they are located. Consider gathering some of these items now and keeping them in a box that is ready to go.

Remember the five P's:

PILLS, eyeglasses and other medical supplies

PICTURES, small artwork, jewelry and other important mementos

PETS, pet food, leashes and pet carriers

PAPERS, like birth certificates and tax records

PHONE, charger and phone numbers of people you will want to call



More information about caring for pets is at www.apnm.org/disasterplanning

Leaving the house ~ Put on cotton clothing with long sleeves, plus boots and gloves. Before you leave, close all windows and all doors into garages, barns and sheds. Close the windows of any vehicles that you will leave behind. Turn off ventilation fans in the house. Close the valve on the propane tank. Turn on all outdoor lights. If you have time to set up a sprinkler, have it spray vegetation next to your home.



Leave gates open so that firefighters can access your property. Follow instructions from police and fire personnel, because they have the most current information about the location and path of the fire. Do not return home until emergency personnel have determined that it is safe.

Caring for horses ~ Get your horses used to being loaded in a trailer. If fire is approaching your property, remove fly masks and tack made from plastic or nylon. Leather and cotton are more fire-safe. Since neighbors or firefighters may turn your horses loose, so that they won't be trapped by a fire, be sure that each animal has some form of identification ~ a brand, microchip or your name on their tack. Having a picture of each animal with you can help others find them.



Driving in smoke ~ If you must drive into smoke, turn on your lights and flashers. Roll up the windows and unlock the doors. Turn off fans that would bring smoke into the vehicle. Then go very slowly. This will help you stay on the road and avoid colliding with other vehicles. Do not stop over flaming debris.



If you get trapped ~ If you are trapped in your car, park in an area that is clear of vegetation, close all windows and vents, cover yourself with a blanket or jacket and lie on the floor. Be aware that the tires may burst. Stay in your car until the fire passes.

How to know where to go

Listen to the radio to learn what facility has been designated as a public shelter. The Valencia County Department of Emergency Services will select a location that is easy to get to and is away from the fire danger.



Fire prevention in the Bosque

Where to get information

The Rio Grande Bosque is a rare and important habitat and one of the few cottonwood forests of its size in the world. The Bosque has given life to those along its banks for centuries, and struggles to endure the impacts of changes from human development and invasion by non-native plant species that have made wildfires much more severe.

Fires have always been present in the Rio Grande Valley. However, today's drier conditions and heavier fuels, have resulted in fires that have caused irreparable damage. They have destroyed large stands of native bosque and critical wildlife habitat, and endangered people and property close to the bosque.

In recent times, inter-agency restoration projects have helped restore large sections of the bosque in Valencia County to a more natural state. However, with prolonged drought and the lack of seasonal flooding, the bosque remains at risk. Smoking, fires and fireworks are prohibited in the bosque for this reason. Visitors should be very cautious with vehicles and anything that could produce sparks.

The Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District asks you to help prevent devastating wildfires, to protect our precious bosque and neighbors, and "Keep the Valley Green."

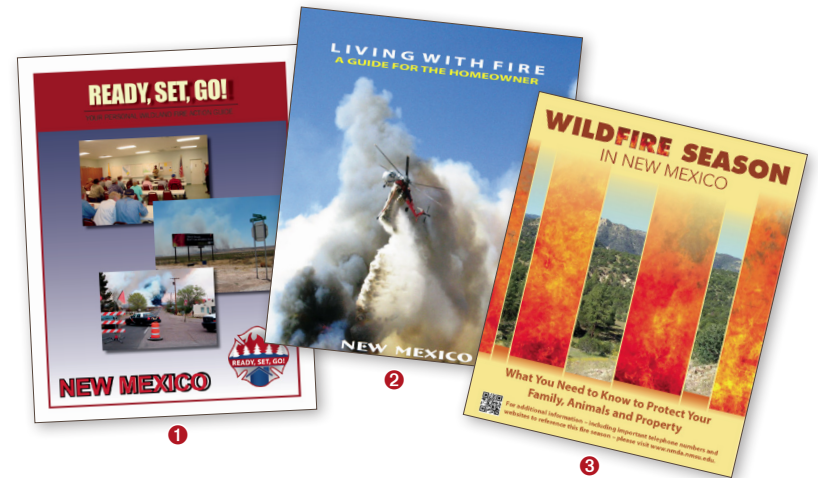


The Wildland Team of the Valencia County Fire Department is working with NM State Forestry and MRGCD in the Jarales bosque to remove non-native trees and brush such as Salt Cedar and Russian Olive trees. The Fire Department is taking a proactive approach to lessening the severity of catastrophic wildfires in the bosque.



Almost all of the communities in Valencia County directly benefit from the bosque that lines the shores of the Rio Grande.

These three publications contain a great deal of information to help you prepare your family, property and animals for a wildfire.



At these websites you can read, download or print each publication.

- 1 <http://www.emnrd.state.nm.us/SFD/documents/RSGActionGuideNM.pdf>
- 2 http://nmfireinfo.files.wordpress.com/2009/06/60589_jes.pdf
- 3 http://apnm.org/news/2013/Wildfire_Tab_2013.pdf



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Information about current wildfires and prescribed burns in New Mexico can be found at this website: <http://nmfireinfo.com>



Partners in Protection

Open burning rules

New in 2014:

All locations in Valencia County have new burn hours

What you can burn

Brush
Leaves
Weeds
Crop waste
Grass clippings
Untreated wood

NO BURN BARRELS



NO TRASH BURNING

You must stay with your burn and make sure it is completely out before you leave.

If you are having trouble controlling your burn, call 911.

What you need to do

You must call on the day you want to burn to find out if burning is allowed that day. Who you call depends on where you live.

If you live in **Valencia County**, but not in one of the communities listed below, you must call the Valencia County Fire Administration Office at 505-866-2040 each day you want to burn. Outside of business hours and on weekends, call Dispatch at 505-865-9130. If it is a Burn Day, tell them your name, phone number and address where you will be burning.

If you live in **Belen** or **Los Lunas**:

You must get a written burn permit from your Fire Department. It is good for 30 days. Each day you want to burn you must call Dispatch at 505-865-9130 to find out if it is a Burn Day.

If you live in **Bosque Farms**:

You must get a written burn permit from the Village Office. It is good for 2 weeks. Each weekday you want to burn you must call the Village Office at 505-869-2357 to find out if it is a Burn Day. Outside of business hours and on weekends, call Dispatch at 505-865-9130.

If you live in **Peralta**

Each weekday you want to burn, you must call Dispatch at 505-865-9130. If it is a Burn Day, tell them your name, phone number and address where you will be burning.



When you can burn

From 1 hour after sunrise
to 1 hour before sunset



This pamphlet was produced with a Wildfire Risk Reduction Grant from the New Mexico Association of Counties.

Remember to call before you burn