

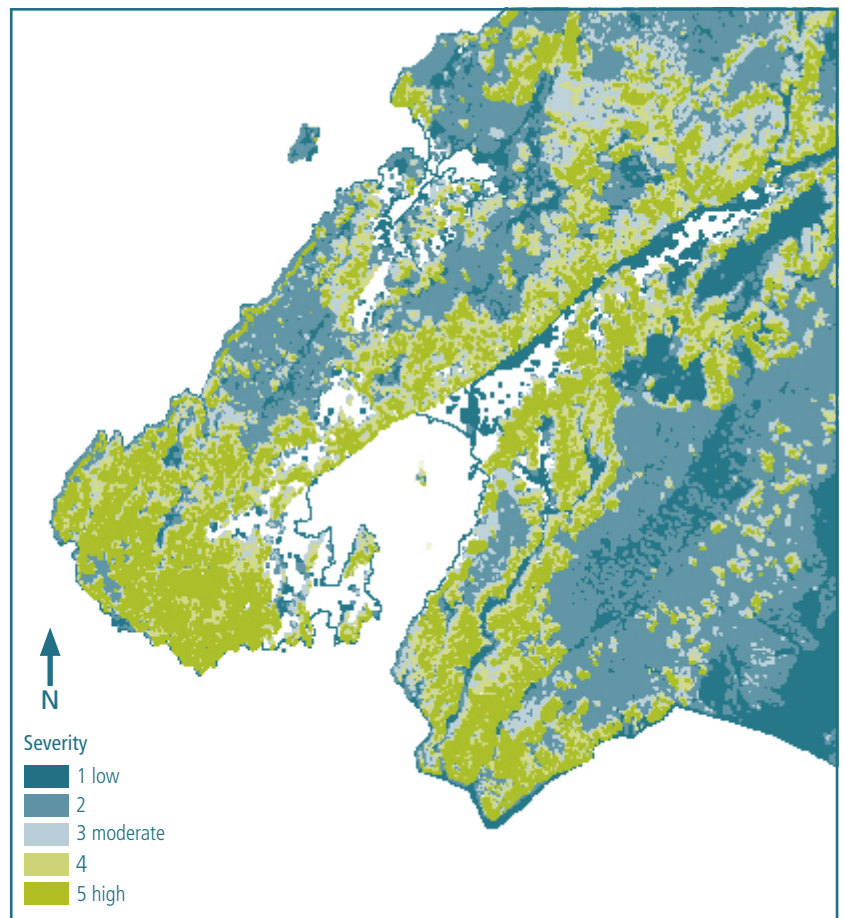


# Wildfire Hazards

This fact sheet describes wildfire hazards in the Wellington Region and advice on what you can do to be prepared.

## What is a wildfire?

A wildfire is an unplanned fire that starts in an open space like a gorse-covered hillside or forest. Fuel such as dead or dry vegetation may catch fire naturally (e.g. by lightning) or, more commonly, by the activities of people. The spread of a wildfire depends on available fuel and oxygen, the weather conditions at the time (including temperature, humidity, wind speed and direction) and the slope of the ground.



Wildfire hazard in the Wellington Region.

## Where do wildfires occur in the Wellington Region?

Living in a house surrounded by bush can be peaceful and beautiful, but it can also be risky. Wildfires periodically burn large areas of gorse or scrub-covered hillsides in the Wellington Region, often close to areas where people live. As the suburbs expand into the hills, more people and property may be at risk from wildfires. The risk is higher if the *safety zone* around houses and properties is small. A safety zone is any area that will not carry fire, such as firebreaks, concrete paths or roads.

About 20% (165,500 ha) of land in the Wellington Region is at high to extreme risk from wildfires. The southern and western edges of Wellington City, Ngaio and Ngauranga gorges, the eastern hills of the Hutt Valley, hills near Eastbourne and Wainuiomata and some areas along the Wairarapa coast are all at risk. The map above shows the relative levels of wildfire hazard in the region.

## What should you do?

- Be careful with fire or equipment that can start fires.
- Use fire resistant building materials and structures (like stone walls).
- Stack woodpiles and other flammable material away from the house.
- Remove dead branches hanging over the roof.
- Clear away dead leaves from the roof and gutters.
- Mow lawns and choose fire resistant plants for gardens. Areas of gorse and scrub can be encouraged to revert to native forest, which is less flammable.

## Be prepared

- Make sure that garden hoses are connected to taps and reach all areas of your property.
- Keep your driveway clear so that fire trucks can reach your house.
- Make sure your property is easy to find from the road.
- Plan and practice how you will evacuate.
- Know at least two suitable exit routes from your neighbourhood.
- Keep a kit of emergency supplies.

## Wildfire!

If a wildfire is threatening your house or property:

1. Dial 111.
2. Follow the instructions of emergency personnel.
3. If you have to evacuate:
  - Close all doors and windows.
  - Leave outside doors unlocked (so that firefighters can get in easily if they need to fight a fire).
  - Leave a light on in each room (to help firefighters see better if it is smokey).

## Further reading

Forme Consulting Group, 1997. *Recent urban interface wildfires in the Wellington Region*. Tawa: Forme Consulting Group.

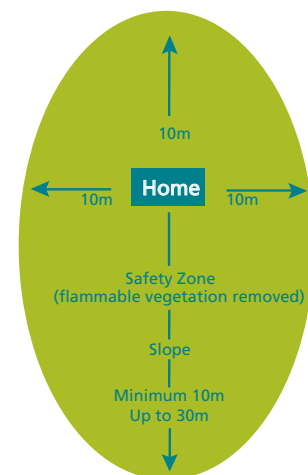
Forme Consulting Group, 1997. *Interface fire hazard susceptibility: Study areas for Wellington City, Hutt Valley (including Wainuiomata and Eastbourne) and Porirua*. Tawa: Forme Consulting Group.

Forme Consulting Group, 1998. *Rural Fire Hazard in the Wellington Region*. Tawa: Forme Consulting Group.

Copies are available to view or purchase at Greater Wellington.

## The Safety Zone

(Source: The National Rural Fire Authority)



## Follow the rules

Before you light a fire, check with your local council to see if you need a permit. In the Wellington Region there are fire lighting restrictions all year. Follow the conditions on your fire permit. Always have a way to put out a fire and never leave a fire unattended. Don't light a fire if you aren't sure it is completely safe. If you light a fire and it escapes, you may have to pay for the fire-fighting costs.

For more information contact the Principal Rural Fire Officer at your local council.

### CONTACTS AND INFORMATION

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