



Firewise Community

5 Points

10 Points

15 Points

New Action November 2015

Brush, grass and forest fires don't have to be disasters. The National Fire Protection Association's (NFPA) [Firewise Communities Program](#) encourages local solutions for safety by involving homeowners in taking individual responsibility for preparing their homes from the risk of wildfire. The Firewise program is a foundational building block for several other wildfire preparedness programs such as Fire Adapted Communities (FAC), Ready, Set, Go, and Community Wildfire Protection Planning (CWPP). The Firewise Communities Program is co-sponsored by the [USDA Forest Service](#), the [US Department of the Interior](#), and the [National Association of State Foresters](#). To save lives and property from wildfire, NFPA's Firewise Communities Program teaches people how to adapt to living with wildfire and encourages neighbors to work together and take action now to prevent losses. This is a grassroots initiative that promotes the concept that everyone has a role to play in protecting ourselves and each other from the risk of wildfire. This is a variable point action (5-15) with more points awarded based on the number of Firewise Communities recognized within a municipality and the establishment of successful mentoring relationships between the Firewise Communities. To earn additional points, a representative from a recognized Firewise Community will need to attend at least one meeting in another region of your municipality and as a result, that community will need to become a recognized Firewise Community\USA.

Why is it important?

According to an American Planning Association study (2000), 46 percent of homes in New Jersey are located in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). The WUI is the area where home and forest meet. The interface is one of the most dangerous areas for fire fighters to work and has the greatest potential for property loss. Studies have concluded that response to wildfires is far more costly and dangerous than conducting mitigation and preparedness actions before a wildfire occurs.

State and municipal resources are limited and finite. By providing the tools, techniques and incentives necessary for residents to become self-empowered, municipalities will be better able to leverage resources to create an autonomous, safe and sustainable wildfire preparedness program, with less dependence on government support.

Who should lead and be involved with this action?

Local residents, homeowners' associations, and fire companies often serve as the primary leadership for the Firewise Communities Program. If a community has established a local Wildfire Safety Council, that group could provide excellent leadership to a neighborhood seeking Firewise Community recognition. Municipal planners, fire companies and emergency management professionals should work with residents and homeowners' association representatives to identify local areas within their municipality where a Firewise Communities Program will be beneficial.

Once individual communities within a municipality agree to participate in the Firewise Community/USA Recognition Program, the next step is to identify local residents or leaders to serve as the "sparkplug" essential to the formation and success of their program. These should work in a coordinated fashion with municipal and state fire agencies, as well as municipal leaders, public works, and the local Office of Emergency Management (OEM) to form a committee that will represent the community and to plan and implement the program.

Timeframe

The time required to complete activities and become recognized in the Firewise Communities/USA Program varies, but usually takes less than a year. Applications for enrollment and annual renewal are due at the end of each calendar year.

To start the process, the neighborhood committee needs to develop a Firewise Community Action Plan (required for enrollment) with input from both local and state fire agencies. The development of an Action Plan usually requires 2 months. An additional 6- 8 months' time is needed to organize a "Firewise Day" event that leverages community resources.

Project costs and resource needs

Enrollment in the Firewise Communities/USA program requires an investment of \$2/capita in the community for wildfire mitigation activities, education, outreach, and/or training. This funding can come from volunteer service time invested in a project as well as out of pocket expenditures for programs or equipment. The NJ State Forestry Services-Forest Fire Service, local volunteer fire companies, public works, OEM, and residents all provide valuable time and energy to support local Firewise Communities Program activities.

Federal funding is available to states that implement a Firewise Communities Program. The NJ State Forestry Services - Forest Fire Service actively seeks federal funding to support Firewise Communities. This funding is then passed through to active communities in the form of [grants](#). Funds are limited and awarded on a first come, first served basis, with 50 percent of project costs, up to \$5,000, eligible for reimbursement through a Firewise Communities' grant.

The national Firewise program also provides free literature, training materials, and online courses to support community involvement.

Participating communities can utilize volunteers and out of pocket expenditures to complete fire hazard mitigation projects. Cost will depend on the size and scope of the specific project that is undertaken. Generally, projects take three to six months to complete.

What to do and how to do it ("How to")

This section provides guidance and recommendations for implementing this action. Your municipality does not need to follow this guidance exactly, as long as it meets the requirements for earning points for this action.

Firewise is a program designed for neighborhoods, communities with Homeowners' Associations or any subsection of a municipality that wants to reduce its risk from wildfire. Entire municipalities are eligible for recognition; however, it is usually more manageable and effective to work with individual communities within the municipality.

The NJ Forest Fire Service and local volunteer fire companies assist with preparing a community risk assessment, training, outreach and education. Community volunteers and/or hired contractors then carry out fire hazard mitigation measures around their homes, roadways and community common areas or park areas.

Neighborhoods and communities develop an Action Plan that guides their residential fire risk reduction activities, while engaging and encouraging their neighbors to become active participants in building a safer place to live. Five points will be awarded to each community or neighborhood that achieves Firewise Communities/ USA recognition status.

1. Achieving Firewise Communities/USA recognition is straightforward and simple. A steering committee to oversee the program is formed by volunteers within the community that represent that geographic area or neighborhood of focus. If the neighborhood includes a homeowners' association, or other neighborhood committee, then these organizations may be the best group to appoint representatives to a steering committee. The steering committee should include residents from the neighborhood being targeted, operations and maintenance staff (if focusing on a specific homeowners' association area) and a representative from the local fire department, if possible.
2. Reach out to the [NJ Forest Fire Service](#) or to the local fire department to obtain a wildfire risk assessment that meets the national Firewise criteria. The national [Community Assessment Template](#) will guide the evaluation of the risk of wildfire to homes and structures. The assessment process will include a site visit by the state forest fire representative that is typically coordinated with your local fire officials. The completed wildfire risk assessment is then presented to the steering committee and serves as the basis for the development of the Firewise Action Plan.
3. Create a [Firewise Action Plan](#) based on information provided in the wildfire risk assessment. Once developed and approved, the plan is valid for five years. The information in the assessment is used to create an agreed-upon, area- specific Action Plan for the community. After the plan is complete, the State

Forest Fire - Firewise liaison will need to approve the plan, following the guidance provided below.

4. Conduct at least one “[Firewise Day](#)” event annually. Host an event within the community to bring residents together to implement one component of your Action Plan. Successful Firewise Communities often partner with their municipal officials and fire companies for support on Firewise related actions such as: community clean up days, brush collection and chipping days, training, and evacuation plans and outreach efforts. These events educate and inform residents of the wildfire risk and help them to become better prepared in the event of a wildfire.
5. Annually, invest a minimum of \$2 per capita in local Firewise actions. For guidance on how to track in-kind and volunteer contributions Firewise has developed [sample forms](#) to help you track volunteer time and services. Fuels’ reduction activities, education and awareness and planning are all considered investments in making your community safer from wildfire.
6. Submit your [Firewise Community/USA application](#) to your [NJ Firewise Liaison](#) by December 31st. The following information will be needed to complete the application to be recognized as a national Firewise Community/USA.
 - Full contact information for your Firewise board or committee chairperson. This person will be the point of contact between the community and the national Firewise program.
 - Copies of your Wildfire Risk Assessment and your Firewise Action Plan. If your [Firewise State Liaison](#) hasn’t gotten copies of these documents already, you’ll need to send them along with the application.
 - The number of residents in your community. An estimate is OK.
 - The amount your community invested this year in Firewise activities. This can be volunteer time, grants, in-kind services, loaned equipment or cash. See the [volunteer forms](#) for handy tools on tracking this investment in your local activity.
 - A description of your Firewise Day event this year. Include photos and any notices or articles whenever possible.

Your NJ Firewise liaison will complete the remaining sections of the application and send the packet to the national NFPA Firewise Communities office in Quincy, Massachusetts for approval. You will receive a welcome letter and recognition materials (street signs, plaque, media kit, etc.) free of charge. You will need to submit your welcome letter as part of your action documentation for the first time you apply for points as a newly recognized Firewise Community. If your community has been participating in the Firewise Program for a number of years, your successful renewal documentation from the previous calendar year will need to be submitted as part of your action documentation.

7. Renew your application annually online at <http://www.firewise.org/login.aspx> to maintain your certification. Each year you will need to continue to have an active Firewise Board or Committee, hold a Firewise Day and invest at least \$2 per capita in Firewise projects in the calendar year. After the initial year, communities will need to [renew](#) their Firewise Communities/USA Program certification in order to earn 5 points in the Sustainable Jersey program.
8. Once your municipality has your first recognized Firewise Community, you can earn additional points under this action by mentoring and supporting additional neighborhoods or regions in your town to successfully gain Firewise recognition. Municipalities can earn a maximum of 15 points (5 for each Firewise recognized community or neighborhood) annually in the program. To earn mentoring and program expansion points, a representative from the recognized or approved Firewise Community will need to attend at least one meeting in another neighborhood in your municipality and that community will need to gain recognition as a Firewise Community. In your program narrative, please describe the mentoring activities that supported the expansion of the number of Firewise neighborhoods in your municipality. You will also need to upload the welcome or renewal letter for each recognized community in your municipality from the previous calendar year.

All documentation must be **from the previous calendar year** in which you are applying for certification.

What to submit to earn points for this action

In order to earn 5-15 points for this action, the following documentation must be submitted as part of the online certification application in order to verify that the action requirements have been met.

Once your municipality has your first recognized Firewise Community, you can earn additional points under this action by mentoring and supporting additional neighborhoods or regions in your town to successfully gain Firewise recognition. Municipalities can earn a maximum of 15 points (5 for each Firewise recognized community or neighborhood) annually in the program.

1. In the text box, please provide a short narrative (300 words maximum) to summarize the accomplishments for each of your Firewise communities. If applying for 10 or 15 points for multiple Firewise communities, the program narrative should describe the mentoring efforts and activities that supported the expansion of the number of recognized Firewise neighborhoods in your municipality.

2. Upload a copy of your welcome (if first time Firewise Community) or your annual renewal letter from the previous calendar year, for each recognized Firewise Community in your municipality.

All documentation must be **from the previous calendar year** in which you are applying for certification.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

There is a limit of six uploaded documents per action and individual files must not exceed 20 MB. Excerpts of relevant information from large documents are recommended.

All action documentation is available for public viewing after an action is approved. Action submissions should not include any information or documents that are not intended to be viewed by the public.

Spotlight: What NJ Communities are doing

North: Hardwick Township, Warren County

Hardwick Township became New Jersey's first recognized Firewise Community in 2004. It is one of the few communities across the country that has continued to meet the program criteria for more than ten years. Hardwick represents the only location within the state where the entire township is a recognized Firewise Community/USA. In most areas of the state, smaller areas within a municipality such as a sub-division, camp or neighborhood are the recognized entities.

Annually, Hardwick has sponsored a community wildfire awareness event to inform residents of their risks. They have also worked with their public works department to conduct community-wide brush clean ups. Further, they have identified rural areas with poor access for emergency vehicles and taken measures to improve response capability.

Central: Country Walk, Manchester Township, Ocean County

The Country Walk Community is located within a portion of the municipality that has experienced several large wildfires over the last 20 years. The community is surrounded by dense pine forest, which presents a high wildfire risk. Upon hearing about the Firewise Communities Program, residents were empowered to participate. They set out to become better educated about the program by attending meetings and workshops that were held by neighboring recognized Firewise Communities. They quickly formed a committee, held an open house for residents, completed a Firewise Community Action Plan and are in the process of implementing their plan to create a perimeter fuel-break around the community. When complete, this project will have reduced the fuel that is adjacent to and that surrounds the community, thus creating a safer environment for firefighters to work from and reducing the potential for fire to spread from the forest to their homes.

South: Horizons at Barnegat, Barnegat Township, Ocean County

Because the Horizons' community was evacuated several times as a result of different wildfires, they were keenly aware of the need to take action and become better prepared for wildfire. It was their innovation in developing simple methods for notification of an evacuation, such as placing a red "E" in the window of a home that has been evacuated, that is being replicated and used by other communities throughout the state. If a home does not have a red "E" in the window, it is a signal to emergency responders that someone is in the home and may need help.

The Horizons' community assessed their immediate wildfire risk by evaluating the forested areas within and adjacent to the community. Each year, they systematically work to reduce fuels by mowing understory shrubs. During their five years of participation in the Firewise Communities Program, they have successfully treated all of the acreage that surrounds the community to reduce fuels, thus creating a safer environment for residents. Each year the cost of these projects has been offset with funds from the Firewise Communities' grant.

Resources

[National Fire Science website](#)

National Firewise Communities

- **[Apply for Recognitions - Application form](#)**
- **[Community Assessment Template](#)**

- [Firewise Communities USA/Recognition Program](#)
- [Firewise Program User Guide](#)
- [Grants and Funding](#)
- [On line Renewal Form](#)
- [Volunteer Tools and Tracking Forms](#)

New Jersey Forest Fire Service

- [NJ Firewise information](#)
- [NJ Firewise State Grant information](#)
- [NJ Firewise Liaison](#)

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