

Visual images courtesy of Mr. Ed. Smith, Natural Resource Specialist, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension

# The Homeowner is Key to Protection from the Devastation of Wildfire

Research and firefighter experience has shown that home construction materials and features, landscape and vegetation management, and homeowner attitude often determine which houses burn and which ones are spared. Choosing to live in a wildfire prone environment like requires that you fulfill your personal responsibility to mitigate the threat of wildfire. In so doing, you not only increase your protection, but also the protection of your neighbors and the entire community. Failure to do so, places your home, the homes and lives of your neighbors, and the lives of firefighters at a higher level of risk and vulnerability. As a starting point, the critically important actions listed below should be given serious consideration.

## **C** Community Awareness, Funding, Pre-fire Preparation, and Creating a Fire Safe Community Culture

**C1** Garden Hose: Providing readily available water and access to the roof of your house will allow an individual firefighter to quickly extinguish spot fires on the roof, the deck, or adjacent to your house. Acquire sufficient garden hose to reach all areas on the exterior of your house and equip each hose with a spray-producing nozzle. Store hoses in a readily accessible location or during the fire season keep them attached to operable exterior faucets.

**C2** Ladder: Acquire a sturdy extension ladder of sufficient length to provide safe access to your roof. Store the ladder in a readily accessible location.

**C3** Fire Extinguisher: Readily accessible fire extinguishers and hand tools such as shovels and rakes should be placed in an easily accessible location where they can be quickly retrieved to suppress an accidental fire.

**C4** Hand Tools: Hand tools such as a shovel, rake, axe, and bucket should be stored in a convenient and easily accessible location.

**C5** Barbeque Grills: Use secured gas grills to cook out-of-doors. Clear a 10 foot area around the grill of easily ignited material. Briquette burning grills should be located out of the wind and not used during periods of extreme fire danger.

**C6** Evacuation: Become familiar with the emergency notification system as well as the evacuation strategy and checklist. Practice leaving your home with critically important documents and supplies in a very short period of time.

**C7** Precincts: Support the work of GHOA's Fire Committee and implementation of the community-wide Fire Safety Plan. Become an active member and assist in the formation of your neighborhood fire safe precincts.

## **D** Defensible Space

**D3** Lean and Green: To effectively reduce fuel volume and lower fire intensity create a "Lean, Clean, and Green" area surrounding your home and other structures. Refer to the vegetation/fuel management prescriptions presented at the "Living With Fire" website ([www.livingwithfire.info](http://www.livingwithfire.info)).

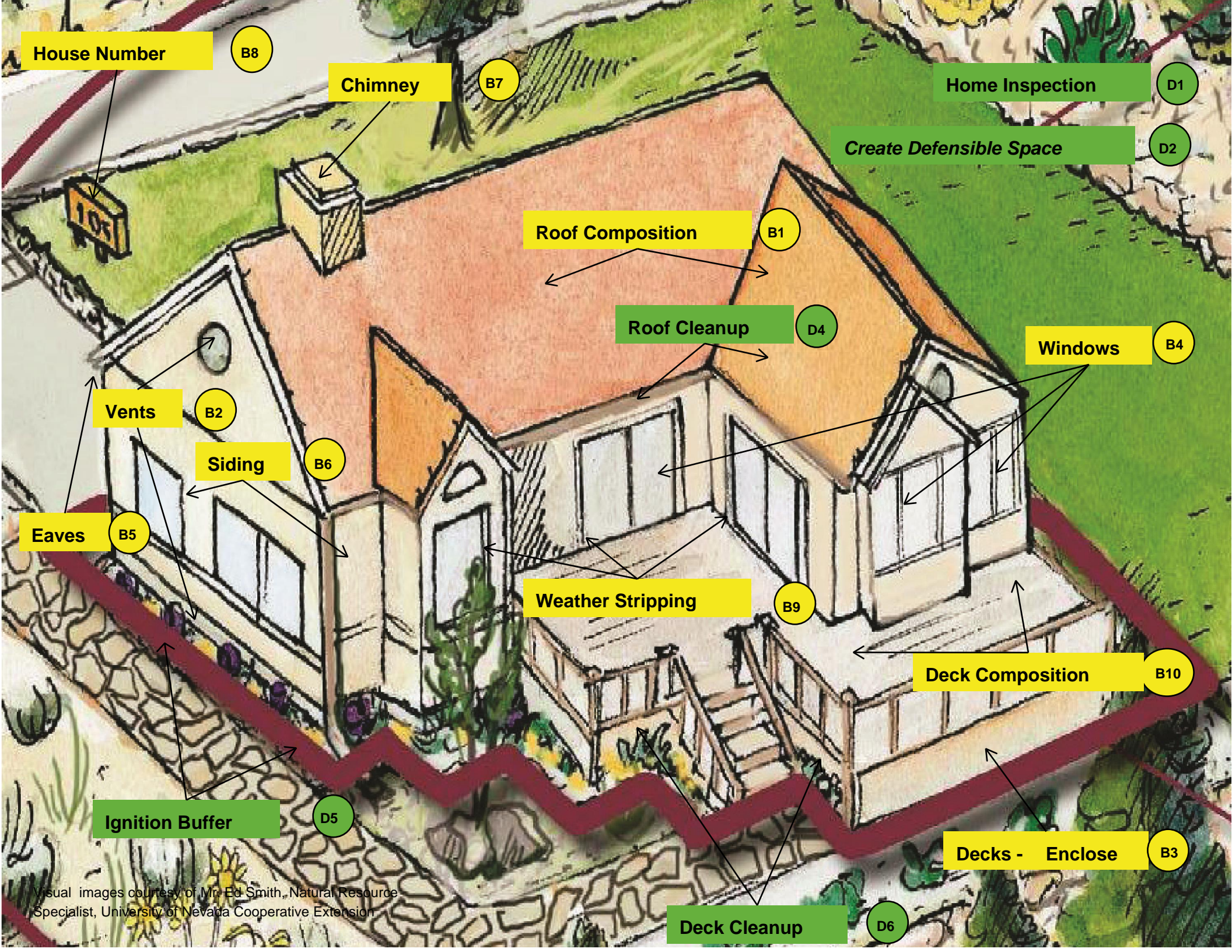
**D7** Firewood: Stacked firewood is easily ignited and becomes a source of blowing embers and direct flame contact with your house. Enclose stacks of firewood within a garage or store at least 30' from homes or other structures.

**D8** Spring Cleanup: Falling embers and firebrands can ignite flammable material that is present on decks, porches and other similar areas. Keep these areas free of accumulated rubbish, flammable debris, and decorative items such as dried flowers, stacked paper, construction waste, pine cones, etc. Similarly, every spring the annual accumulation of needles, leaves, dried grass, dead shrubs, branches and other forest debris should be removed from an area that extends 30 feet from the exterior of your house.

**D9** Propane Tanks: Exposed propane tanks should be protected by removing flammable material including brush, trees, or tree limbs in an area that extends 10 feet in all directions from the tank.

## **B** Building Design, Construction Materials, and Exterior Features

**B11** Fences: Flammable landscape fences such as those using wooden slats or boards can quickly spread fire to a house. Create a separation of at least 12 feet between such a fence and the exterior wall of your house.



House Number

B8

Chimney

B7

Home Inspection

D1

Create Defensible Space

D2

Roof Composition

B1

Roof Cleanup

D4

Windows

B4

Vents

B2

Siding

B6

Eaves

B5

Weather Stripping

B9

Deck Composition

B10

Decks - Enclose

B3

Deck Cleanup

D6

Ignition Buffer

D5

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## **Defensible Space**

**D1**

**Home Inspection:** Call the Tahoe-Douglas Fire Protection District at (775) 588-3591 to request a defensible space inspection of your property or submit your request on-line at [www.tahoefire.com](http://www.tahoefire.com) . **Unimproved lots** should also be scheduled for inspections. D

**D2**

**Create Defensible Space:** Visit the “Living With Fire” web site at [www.livingwithfire.info](http://www.livingwithfire.info). Develop a plan, set goals, and implement the mitigation measures resulting from the inspection(s) **(D1)**.

**D4**

**Roof -Cleanup:** Keep roofs and rain gutters free of litter, and other combustible debris starting in the spring of each year and throughout the summer.

**D5**

**Ignition Buffer:** Do not allow a continuous fuel bed to extend to your home’s foundation. Create a 5’ wide, non-combustible buffer around the foundation of your home and other structures.

**D6**

**Deck -Cleanup:** Clear the area beneath decks or similar structures of all ignitable material including landscape litter, weeds, power equipment, fuel, and construction debris.

## **Building Design, Construction Materials, and Exterior Features**

**B1**

**Roof – Composition:** The roof of your home is the most likely part to ignite during a wildfire. Replace wood shakes or shingles, with “Class A” fire resistant roofing material. On a tile roof, plug or screen the openings under individual tiles.

**B2**

**Vents:** Wind driven embers and firebrands can penetrate a home through attic, eave, and crawl space vents. Install vents that provide a closure mechanism or cover with 1/8 inch non-corrosive wire mesh. Pre-cut covers can be made from ½ inch thick plywood, metal, or multiple folds of heavy aluminum foil. The location of hardware and tools to secure the covers needs to be predetermined so that the covers can be put up quickly.

**B3**

**Decks – Enclose:** The open underside of decks can trap heat, embers, and firebrands from an advancing wildfire. Enclose the area under a deck with a fire resistant material or cover with 1/8 inch wire mesh. Remove decorative wooden lattices or similar flammable features.

**B4**

**Windows:** Radiant heat and direct flame contact can break window glass. The glass in all single pane windows should be replaced with double pane or tempered glass. Exterior, fire resistant shutters or retractable covers can be installed to both protect the window and inhibit ember and firebrand penetration. Replace flammable, interior window coverings with fire resistant material.

**B5**

**Eaves:** Open eaves or other overhanging structures can trap radiant heat causing ignition. Enclose or “box” the open, underside of eaves and similar overhangs.

**B6**

**Siding:** The siding covering the exterior walls of your home is prone to ignition from radiated heat and direct flame contact. Shingle siding is particularly vulnerable. Properly treating the fuels in the defensible space zone can lower the probability of flame contact and prevent radiated heat from reaching ignition level temperatures.

**B7**

**Chimney:** Sparks and firebrands can escape from unprotected chimneys and stovepipes. In addition creosote buildup can ignite creating a chimney or stovepipe fire. Chimney or stovepipe openings should be screened with 1/8 inch or smaller noncombustible mesh or covered with an approved spark-arresting cap. Tree limbs within 10 feet of a chimney should be removed.

**B8**

**House Number:** Firefighters and other emergency responders need to determine their location accurately and quickly, often under very adverse conditions. It is therefore critical that street and address signs be readily visible. Check to be certain your house number is clearly visible from the access road.

**B9**

**Weather Stripping:** Weather stripping is not only an energy saver, but also an effective means to prevent embers from penetrating through gaps under and around exterior entry and garage doors. Use weather stripping to eliminate these gaps if they exist.

**B10**

**Deck Composition:** Old, weathered, and cracked deck material is more prone to ignition than a well maintained surface. Construct or replace open decks with ignition resistant material and maintain in good condition.