

AMERICA'S  
**PrepareAthon!**  
BE SMART. TAKE PART. PREPARE.

# PREPARE YOUR PEOPLE FOR WILDFIRE SAFETY

## K-12 SCHOOLS



## INTRODUCTION

Everyone has a role to play in preparing for a disaster. This day of action guide, *Prepare Your People for Wildfire Safety*, will help you improve the readiness of your teachers, staff, and students for a wildfire by moving them to take action. It provides guidance on how to hold a wildfire preparedness discussion and conduct a short drill as a day of action for your school or school district. Many individuals within your organization can lead this effort; you may be a principal, a teacher, or someone involved in administration or facilities, or another program. Please see *A Playbook for Your Day of Action: K–12 Schools* for information and resources to make implementation easy.

America's PrepareAthon! also offers the *Prepare Your Organization for Wildfire Safety: K–12 Schools* day of action guide to help assess and improve your ability to maintain or re-establish operations when affected by a wildfire.

## WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS

People at risk from a wildfire may need to evacuate their home with little notice and be away for several days, possibly even weeks. Items left behind could become ruined or burned, and be difficult to clean or recover. After the wildfire is extinguished, rebuilding lives will require documentation for insurance claims and for assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) or other sources.

To be prepared for a wildfire, it's important to be ready to evacuate quickly. This means monitoring alerts and warnings information, having a family communication plan, knowing evacuation routes, and having personal items and documents in order. The *How to Prepare for a Wildfire* guide provides additional information on wildfire basics, how to protect yourself and your property, and what steps to take now.

## BEFORE YOUR DAY OF ACTION

- Review the America's PrepareAthon! *How to Prepare for a Wildfire* guide at [www.ready.gov/prepare](http://www.ready.gov/prepare).
- Use the *Be Smart. Know Your Alerts and Warnings* worksheet to identify relevant local and national alert systems; and find out what your school uses to monitor severe weather.
- Establish procedures for notifying all school occupants when a wildfire warning is issued or whenever they need to take action to protect themselves.
- Review the *Be Smart. Protect Your Critical Documents and Valuables* checklist or the more comprehensive Emergency Financial First Aid Kit (EFFAK) at [www.ready.gov/financialpreparedness](http://www.ready.gov/financialpreparedness). The EFFAK provides templates to help collect the documentation need after a disaster to get on the road to recovery.
- Add this topic to the agenda of your next PTA or other meeting with parents to talk about the ways in which the school communicates with parents in case of an emergency (e.g., listservs, emails, text messages, website).
- Review the information on creating a family communication plan and the two-page contact sheet at [www.ready.gov/make-a-plan](http://www.ready.gov/make-a-plan).
- Visit [www.ready.gov/kids/educators](http://www.ready.gov/kids/educators) for resources that teachers can use for student activities at all grade levels.
- Review the information at [www.ready.gov/individuals-access-functional-needs](http://www.ready.gov/individuals-access-functional-needs) and consider the needs of individuals in your school with access and functional needs.
- If you are sending mock severe weather notifications as a drill on your day of action, identify an individual to manage the drill and coordinate communications about it. Publicize the drill in advance to encourage participation and visit [www.ready.gov/prepare](http://www.ready.gov/prepare) to download free customizable promotional materials.

## HOLD A WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS DISCUSSION

Research shows there is a strong relationship between talking about preparedness and taking action.<sup>1</sup> The America's PrepareAthon! wildfire preparedness discussion is designed as a short, structured session to emphasize the steps your teachers and staff can take to be ready.

### GOALS

- Ensure teachers and staff know the basics about wildfires and know how to find out their risk.
- Encourage teachers and staff to be ready to evacuate and to identify important financial and medical documents, records, and contact information they should collect and keep in a safe place.
- Ensure teachers and staff know your school's emergency communications plan and procedures.
- Encourage teachers and staff to share their experiences and talk about wildfire preparedness with their families, friends, and neighbors.

### TIME

15–30 minutes. You can cover the basics in as little as 15 minutes. Half an hour will provide time for more discussion.

### SETTING

Consider adding your wildfire preparedness discussion to the agenda of your next staff meeting or arranging a brown bag lunch session. Do what works best to get the conversation started.

### SUGGESTED AGENDA

Use the *How to Prepare for a Wildfire* guide as a reference for the discussion.

1. **Wildfire Basics:** Remind teachers and staff that wildfires occur everywhere in the country. They can start anywhere, from remote wilderness areas to backyards. Wildfires can start from natural causes, such as lightning, or humans can start them—accidentally, from cigarettes, campfires, or outdoor burning, or on purpose. Wildfires can happen anytime but are most common in the summer, fall, and winter, especially during dry periods with an increase in dead fuels, such as brush, grass, mulch, and trees, and high winds.
2. **Alerts and Warnings:** Provide teachers and staff with the *Be Smart. Know Your Alerts and Warnings* worksheet, which outlines available alerts, notifications, apps, and other resources available by location and hazard. Share which local and national alert systems your school monitors in the event of severe weather. Encourage everyone to sign up for local text alerts on their phones. Also, discuss how you will receive alerts and notifications if the power is out.
3. **Emergency Communications, Policies, and Procedures:** Provide all participants with a copy of the school's emergency policies and procedures, including information about office closures, telecommuting, and communications. Let people know how they will be notified in an emergency (e.g., via the website, text alerts, email, public address system). As appropriate, make sure teachers and staff know your emergency hotline number, know how to access your website for important information during a disaster, and are signed up

to receive text alerts if they are available. Be sure to include and discuss the needs of individuals with access and functional needs.

4. **Wildfire Preparedness:** Explain basic preparations for a wildfire, including preparing an emergency kit; protecting your property by reducing sources of fuel in and around your home/property; using irrigation, space, and fire-resistant plantings and landscaping; and planning several evacuation routes from home and work.
  - Encourage everyone to think about which community evacuation routes to take, how they would get in touch with their family, and what they would want to take with them.
  - Hand out the *Be Smart. Protect Your Critical Documents and Valuables* checklist and encourage teachers and staff to note what documents they should collect and keep in a safe place. Refer them to the Emergency Financial First Aid Kit (EFFAK) at [www.ready.gov/financialpreparedness](http://www.ready.gov/financialpreparedness) for more complete information about the critical personal documents they may need in the event of a disaster.
5. **Student Preparedness Activities, Lessons, and Resources:** Discuss activities and lessons on preparedness that can be incorporated into the students' curriculum. Encourage teachers to visit [www.ready.gov/kids](http://www.ready.gov/kids) and [www.ready.gov/publications](http://www.ready.gov/publications) for tools and resources. Provide the link to the Family Communication Plan, [www.ready.gov/kids/make-a-plan](http://www.ready.gov/kids/make-a-plan), and ask teachers to include this in their lesson plan for the day of action.
6. **Note: If you are conducting a day of action wildfire drill:** You can conduct a wildfire drill on the same day as your preparedness discussion or a few days later. Tell meeting attendees that the upcoming wildfire drill will include mock emergency notifications to simulate how the school will communicate with its teachers and staff in the event of a wildfire warning or other severe weather. Inform attendees that the drill will focus on encouraging everyone to create a family communication plan and a contact sheet as one important step to becoming prepared to evacuate. However, there are other important steps, including knowing evacuation routes, having personal items and documents in order, and being able to receive important alerts and warnings information.

**Materials:** Have copies of the *How to Prepare for a Wildfire* guide and the family communication plan template at [www.ready.gov/make-a-plan](http://www.ready.gov/make-a-plan) as handouts. Email or distribute the links to these as well as to the *Playbook for Individuals and Families* and *Be Smart. Know Your Alerts and Warnings* as advance reading or as followup.

## CONDUCT A WILDFIRE DRILL

Conducting a drill with realistic emails of severe weather warnings can help people better imagine what a real severe wildfire situation would feel like. This kind of practice scenario can make all the difference in motivating people to take action. While being fully prepared may require additional actions, this drill is designed to encourage your teachers and staff to take one simple step now that will help them react and recover faster if a disaster happens.

The wildfire drill will focus on the important step of making a family communication plan as a way of encouraging more individuals to start the preparedness process. Encourage teachers and staff to review the America's PrepareAthon! *How to Prepare for a Wildfire* guide for more information on wildfire preparedness. This drill will also provide the chance to test your communications systems and identify any necessary improvement so you'll be ready in a real emergency. Included are sample notifications and tips for a post-drill discussion. The drill and followup discussion can be conducted in less than an hour.

## OPTIONAL STUDENT WILDFIRE ACTIVITY

On the day of action, during a scheduled lesson, ask students to complete a family communication plan (available at [www.ready.gov/kids/make-a-plan](http://www.ready.gov/kids/make-a-plan)), including family phone numbers, allergies, and at least one out-of-town contact. Introduce the importance of having a family communication plan and instruct students to talk with their parent(s) or guardian(s) about creating one.

## DRILL OVERVIEW

On the day of the drill, your drill coordinator will send a notification through your school's normal messaging channels to all drill participants about a wildfire warning for the area. The first notification informs participants that a wildfire warning has been issued. The second notification alerts participants that a wildfire is spreading.

After sending the two notifications and allowing time for participants to begin creating a family communication plan, your drill coordinator will send an "all clear" message telling participants the drill is over. The final message reminds participants that your school conducted this drill because wildfires are possible in your area and that it's important to prepare.

The schedule below shows the suggested order of events for the drill.

## SAMPLE SCHEDULE

Time	Action
1:00 p.m.	Participants receive notification that a wildfire warning has been issued for the area. Participants are encouraged to read the information on creating a family communication plan. Participants are also instructed to stay informed by monitoring the weather through apps and radio stations and checking the school website and hotline for guidance.
1:30 p.m.	Participants receive a second notification informing them that a wildfire is spreading. Participants are encouraged to begin to complete a family communication plan and to stay informed.
1:37 p.m.	Participants receive an "all clear" message telling them the drill is over. Participants are reminded how important it is to prepare for wildfires and other emergencies.

After the drill, give participants an opportunity to offer feedback about their experience. Encourage them to suggest improvements on your school's ability to communicate effectively with teachers and staff in the event of a wildfire or

other severe weather. Collect participant feedback through notes from individual or group discussions, electronic or paper surveys, comment cards, or suggestion boxes.

## SAMPLE NOTIFICATIONS

The following are samples of notifications you might send to participants before, during, and after the wildfire preparedness drill. You can customize them with specific details about your school and your area. These notifications can be sent by email, text, or any other means of communication you commonly use. Make sure all communications clearly convey that this is a drill and not an actual wildfire.

## INTRODUCE AMERICA'S PREPAREATHON! TO TEACHERS AND STAFF

**Suggested Timing:** One week before the day of the drill

**Appropriate for:** Text alert, email, letter, intranet, staff meeting

**Subject Line:** America's [Or your school's name] PrepareAthon! for Wildfire Safety

To All Teachers and Staff,

On [Date], [Name of school] will participate in America's PrepareAthon!, a national initiative to increase the number of people in America who understand the disasters that could happen in their community and take steps to increase their preparedness. Please plan to take part! It takes less than 30 minutes and could make all the difference for your safety and well-being. Please spread the word to your and colleagues so they participate as well.

### WHAT TO EXPECT

On [Date], [Name of school] will test our emergency notifications to teachers and staff by simulating how we will communicate with you in the event of a wildfire. We will remind you of school policies and procedures. This drill will help you imagine a severe wildfire situation, think through how you would respond, and take simple steps to improve your readiness for a wildfire.

### GET PREPARED

Your personal preparedness is important. The America's PrepareAthon! website includes preparedness guides for different hazards, including *How to Prepare for a Wildfire*. Go to [www.ready.gov/prepare](http://www.ready.gov/prepare) to read more.

Thank you in advance for participating. We value your safety. If you have questions about America's PrepareAthon! and our participation in this campaign, please contact [Point of contact].

## BEGIN DRILL / ANNOUNCE WILDFIRE WARNING

**Suggested Timing:** Send out or announce at 1 p.m. on the day of the drill. (*Beginning at 1 p.m. follow the sample schedule above; you may modify drill notification times to accommodate your class schedule.*) You may also consider coordinating this drill with the timing of the preparedness discussion noted above.

**Appropriate for:** Email, alert/notification systems

**Subject Line:** THIS IS A DRILL: Wildfire Warning in Effect

Attention Teachers and Staff,

**THIS IS A DRILL.**

Local media outlets have reported that fire departments and the U.S. Forest Service have responded to and contained several small brush fires in remote areas. According to the National Weather Service, the combination of dry fuels and weather conditions has drastically increased the risk of extreme fire danger. The threat for wildfire has been extended to more densely populated areas, including communities built close to wildfire-prone lands.

*A **wildfire weather warning** (also called a **Red Flag Warning by fire-weather forecasters**) means there is an ongoing wildfire, or critical weather conditions will occur within the next 24 hours. These conditions include sustained winds averaging 15 miles per hour or greater, relative humidity of 25 percent or less, and temperatures of 75°F or greater.*

We will continue to monitor the weather as it evolves through **[List the monitoring services you are using, such as All Hazards NOAA Weather Radio, National Weather Service, or local radio]** and emergency notifications from officials.

Everyone should remain alert to this situation. Attached are our emergency procedures and policies, including information on school closures, telecommuting and communications, alternate class schedules and assignments, and emergency operations in case the situation worsens.

## ISSUE WILDFIRE WARNING UPDATE

**Suggested Timing:** Send out or announce at 1:30 p.m. on the day of the drill.

**Appropriate for:** Email, alert/notification systems

**Subject Line:** THIS IS A DRILL: Wildfire Spreading

Attention Teachers and Staff,

**THIS IS A DRILL.**

**SCHOOL CLOSED TOMORROW DUE TO WILDFIRE.**

At 1:15 p.m., our school received an alert that the U.S. Forest Service spotted a fire 40 miles outside of town. The fire is spreading rapidly, threatening nearby forest and moving in the direction of **[Insert community]**. The local fire chief warns that at the fire's current rate of spread, it will reach residential and business areas within 24 hours if not contained. A mandatory evacuation has been issued for **[Insert community]**, which includes this school. **[Insert evacuation instructions]**.

Our school will be closed tomorrow at a minimum. Attached is a copy of our emergency policies and procedures. We will contact you via email and our website to communicate updates as the situation evolves. Please prepare yourselves and your families. Stay informed by listening to local media for up-to-date information.

**This is a drill:** Take a few minutes to imagine if this were really happening—if this wildfire were happening in our area right now. What steps would you need to take to be able to evacuate quickly? How would you stay informed about the wildfire and notifications from officials about evacuation? Think about where your family members would be and how you would communicate with them.

Take the next 10 minutes and begin to complete a family communication plan at [www.ready.gov/make-a-plan](http://www.ready.gov/make-a-plan), also attached. Take a moment and sign up for **[Local city/county alert system]** to stay informed and monitor the changing weather conditions.

## END DRILL / ANNOUNCE ALL CLEAR

**Suggested Timing:** Send out or announce at 1:37 p.m.

**Appropriate for:** Email, alert/notification systems

**Subject Line:** THIS IS A DRILL: All Clear

Attention Teachers and Staff,

### THE WILDFIRE DRILL IS OVER.

We conducted this drill today because wildfires are possible in this area and it's important to prepare.

**[Name of school]** monitors weather conditions and will continue to inform teachers and staff of changing weather conditions that could impact our area.

We hope you took a moment to start your family communication plan and familiarize yourself with our emergency policies and procedures. Please take this opportunity to talk with your family about what you would need in order to be prepared for a wildfire and other possible disasters. We encourage you to create a family communication and evacuation plan. Thank you for taking part!

To learn more about simple steps that will help you survive and recover from wildfires and other major disasters, visit [www.ready.gov/prepare](http://www.ready.gov/prepare).

## CONDUCT A POST-DRILL DISCUSSION

After your day of action, ask participants to give feedback on their experiences. It is generally best if this can occur within a week of the exercise to keep the experience fresh. Encourage participants to offer ideas for improving the school's wildfire preparedness. Their input is valuable for improving your school's safety. Collect participant feedback through notes from individual or group discussions, electronic or paper surveys, comment cards, or suggestion boxes.

Below is a sample script for a post-drill group discussion. If you prefer, you can also send these questions as a survey or include them on a comment card. You may also want to offer participants a way to provide anonymous feedback.

### SCRIPT FOR POST-DRILL GROUP DISCUSSION

Use the list of questions below to get the discussion started. Make sure everyone gets the chance to provide feedback.

*It is important to pay attention to the emotional reactions of participants during the discussion. If you notice anyone expressing discomfort or anxiety, adjust the conversation to minimize the participant's discomfort. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Disaster Technical Assistance Center provides a host of materials for use when discussing disasters. These materials are available at [www.samhsa.gov/dtac](http://www.samhsa.gov/dtac).*

**FACILITATOR:** Thank you for your participation in our America's PrepareAthon! day of action to be better prepared for possible disasters. I want to take a few minutes to talk about the drill and what we learned today, as well as what we can do for the future. Your comments and feedback may be shared with administration as we continue to improve our ability to prepare for wildfires.

1. What did you think of the drill?
2. What did you learn?

3. What are some of the strengths or weaknesses regarding how we communicated with you about the drill and the information we provided?
4. What are some things that surprised you as you thought through how your family would evacuate? Was transportation a concern? Were your personal documents stored somewhere safe?
5. In a real disaster, would you be able to get in touch with your family? Do you know the emergency plans and policies of your children's school(s)?
6. What are some things you plan to do over the next couple of weeks to make yourself and your family better prepared to act if you need to evacuate?
7. What are some next steps we should take as a school to improve our preparedness?

**FACILITATOR:** Does anyone have anything else they would like to add before we conclude? I want to thank each of you for participating in this drill. We are committed to your safety and will provide updates on any changes we make as a result of the drill or other preparedness planning. We also encourage everyone to talk about wildfire preparedness with your families, friends, and neighbors. Thank you.