

Create a circle of safety at home

Before summer arrives, create a circle of safety around your home to protect it from wildfire.

The Oregon Department of Forestry, Keep Oregon Green Association, Oregon State Fire Marshal and fire educators statewide are spreading the word on ways to help prevent human-caused wildfires, as well as how to protect a home in case a fire encroaches.

“In a large fire event, firefighters may not have the capacity or resources to defend every house. Just as you lock the doors to keep your home and family safe, think of creating a fuel-free defensible space, a ‘circle of safety,’ around your home to reduce fire danger and provide safe access to firefighters so they can protect it,” said Kristin Babbs, president of Keep Oregon Green.

The main culprits are a wildfire’s hot embers. They can waft through the air a mile or more ahead of the actual flame front and come to rest in leaves and needles accumulated on the roof, or in flammable plants in the landscaping. In a matter of

minutes the embers can ignite the surrounding fuel. In some instances, house fires started by embers on the roof and in rain gutters have smoldered without smoke for days, creeping into the roof’s underlayment, before bursting into open flames.

“You can’t control where these embers land, but you can control what happens when they do,” she said.

To create a circle of safety around your property, start with the house and the first 30 feet extending from the outermost part of the structure, including detached garages and sheds. The roof is the most vulnerable part of the home. Regularly clear leaves and needles from the roof and gutters, and cut back any tree limbs that overhang the roof.

Landscaping should consist of low-growing, fire-resistant plants that are spaced carefully so as not to draw a fire to the structure with surrounding fuel. Rake leaves and debris from the yard, mow grass, prune trees six to 10 feet up from the ground, and keep plants well-watered to prevent a surface fire from climbing into

the tree crowns and carrying flames to the house. Properly placed deciduous trees can actually protect a home by blocking a wildfire’s intense heat.

Fuel breaks, such as driveways, gravel walkways, and green lawns can halt the advance of a fire by starving it of fuel.

In the zone 100 to 200 feet from the home, trees may need to be thinned, though less intensively than those closer in, so that canopies are not touching.

It is not inevitable that a wildfire will consume everything in its path. The more defensible-space work a homeowner can accomplish before fire season, the better a home’s chances of surviving a wildfire.

“It’s peace of mind knowing that if you leave your home for a stretch of time this summer, it will still be standing when you return,” Babbs said.

More tips on how to create defensible space around your home and protect it from wildfire can be found at www.firewise.org and www.keeporegongreen.org.

Sisters Country birds

By Douglas Beall
Correspondent

Dropping from a perch to feed on ground insects or consuming many berries including poison oak, our Western bluebirds are beginning to build their nests in tree cavities or bird houses. The male will begin singing before dawn to mark his breeding territory. The female gathers fine grasses, needles, feathers, and horsehair and constructs a loose nest where she lays 2-8 pale blue to white eggs. Bluebirds may raise 2-3 broods using the same nest or build another nest.

After incubating for

12-17 days the nestlings will be fed for 18-25 days before leaving their home. Often the parents have helpers who help in attending the young, and up to 45 percent of the nests contain young that are not the resident male’s offspring.

On their wintering grounds the Western bluebird will sometimes form flocks of up to 100 with robins and mountain bluebirds mixed within the flocks.

A collection of Western bluebirds is called a “hermitage.” For more bluebird photos visit <http://abirdsingsbecauseithasa.com/recent-journeys>.



PHOTO BY DOUGLAS BEALL

The Western bluebirds (*Sialia mexicana*) have returned to Oregon after wintering in California and Mexico.

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Gary grew up in the floor covering business and has been with I&J Carpets for 18 years — because it means something to work for a company where quality comes first.