

BIPARTISAN WILDFIRE CAUCUS

# WILDFIRE RESOURCE GUIDE



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## Letter from Caucus Co-Chairs Joe Neguse and Celeste Maloy

Dear friends,

We are no strangers to wildfires. In recent years, however, our fire seasons have grown longer, and fires are burning larger areas with more intensity. We created the Bipartisan Wildfire Caucus to ensure that we are working collaboratively on solutions to these challenges.

In the event that your home, family, or community are threatened by wildfire, we want to ensure that you have the resources you need. We developed this guide to provide you with useful information about how to prepare for and recover from wildfires.

Moreover, our offices, and those of our fellow Bipartisan Wildfire Caucus members, are here to help. If you lose important federal documents, such as Social Security cards or passports, your Representative can help you. If you need information about evacuations or resources, they can help with that, too. If you have questions about how to make a plan to evacuate, how to access your mail, or how to vote, just call. If your Representative and their staff are not able to assist you directly, they will get you in contact with the people who can.

Thank you once again to all the first responders and volunteers at the front lines of these fires for working day and night to keep everyone safe. We will get through this together.

Stay safe, stay healthy, and stay hopeful,

Joe Neguse  
Bipartisan Wildfire Caucus Co-Chair  
Member of Congress

Celeste Maloy  
Bipartisan Wildfire Caucus Co-Chair  
Member of Congress

# Summary of Assistance

## *Quick Access to Resources*

**Immediate Needs:** The best place to find the most up-to-date information about evacuations, credentials, and resources is through your local county emergency management's office.

**Emergency Shelter:** Locate options by zip code by visiting the [American Red Cross](#), [Salvation Army](#), or by texting SHELTER and your zip code (for example, "SHELTER 01234") to 4FEMA (43362). Standard text message rates apply. You can also download the [FEMA Mobile App](#) to find open shelters.

Para Español, envía un mensaje de texto con REFUGIO y tu código postal a 4FEMA (43362).

**Assistance with Federal Agencies:** Congressional staff are here to help! We can assist with any federal agency, help you replace lost documents, and simply help point you in the right direction for resources. Contact your Representative to learn more.

## Staying Safe and Being Prepared

Our hope is that you and your loved ones are safe. Wildfires can be unpredictable and change at a moment's notice. If you have a wildfire in your area, please follow the local evacuation orders and please stay prepared.

## *Wildfire Preparedness Tips*

You can use the U.S. Forest Service's [Wildfire Risk to Communities](#) tool to view wildfire risk in your community, in addition to actions you can take to protect yourself and your home. This tool includes important information about how to reduce wildfire risk and actions you can take, including:

- Building and maintaining ignition-resistant homes
- Evacuation and Readiness tips
- Preparation for wildfire smoke impacts
- How to prevent wildfire ignition
- Community wildfire protection plans

You can also use the U.S. Forest Service's [WildfireSAFE app and website](#) to view current wildfire conditions and incidents around the nation. Wildfire SAFE provides access to current fire weather information, and potential forecasts up to 7 days out.

Be Ready: <https://wildfirerisk.org/reduce-risk/evacuation-readiness/>

If you live in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) - an area where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuels -wildfire mitigation is essential.

To help you better understand the unique risks of living in the WUI, the [Wildland-Urban Interface \(WUI\) Fire Property Awareness Explorer Application](#) allows you to search your address and assess key factors like structure density and proximity to vegetative fuels. This tool is crucial for developing fire-adapted communities and creating effective mitigation and outreach plans. Additionally, the [WUI Fire Community Awareness Explorer](#) dashboard offers a quick overview of wildfire hazards for structures in the WUI across US counties—identifying vulnerable areas and aiding in planning and outreach for building fire-adapted communities.

## *Making a Plan*

### **Creating an Evacuation Plan**

We know that making a plan is not always possible due to rapid changes in wind and other conditions. But if you think your area could be susceptible to wildfires, please make a plan ahead of time.

- ☐ Learn your local community's evacuation plan.
- ☐ Ask friends or family members outside of your area if you can stay with them.
- ☐ If you have a disability, make a plan with family members and care providers.
- ☐ Check with your county emergency management office to find out what shelters are open in case you need to evacuate your home. Follow guidance from local public health and emergency management officials on when and where to shelter.
- ☐ If you have pets, find out which shelters allow animals and up to what size. If you plan to take your pet with you, bring any necessary medications.
- ☐ Find out which sites are sheltering larger barnyard animals if applicable.
- ☐ Pack a "go bag" (see list below).
- ☐ Place all important documentation in a fireproof safe.
- ☐ Withdraw cash in case the power goes out.

### **Pre-Evacuation Steps**

If you are able to take a couple of steps to prepare before evacuating, here are some items to take into consideration:

- ☐ Close all windows and doors. Remove all flammable window shades and curtains. Close metal shutters.
- ☐ Move flammable furniture to the middle of the room, away from doors and windows.

- ☐ Shut off gas at the meter. Turn off pilot lights and air conditioning systems.
- ☐ Gather flammable items from outside of the house (patio furniture) and bring them inside.
- ☐ Close patio umbrellas and retract awnings.
- ☐ Turn off all propane tanks and move appliances away from structures. Do not leave sprinklers or water running.
- ☐ Back your car into the driveway and ensure all its windows and doors are closed. Ensure your emergency kit is in the vehicle.
  - ☐ Have a full tank of gas.
- ☐ Tell a friend, neighbor, or out of area contact where you plan to go.

### **What to Bring**

It is suggested to pack a 3-day supply of items that are ready to go in case of an evacuation (a “go bag”). Have these items ready to go either in your car or by the door:

- ☐ Medications
- ☐ Personal hygiene items
- ☐ On-the-go disinfectant supplies
- ☐ Baby supplies, if applicable
- ☐ Pet supplies and medications, if applicable
- ☐ Cell phones with chargers and portable power bank if available
- ☐ N95 or KN95 masks (cloth and surgical masks do not protect from wildfire smoke)
- ☐ Family and emergency contact information
- ☐ Important personal documents (social security card, car registration, passport, birth certificate)

### *Wildfire Smoke*

Wildfire smoke is a mixture of air pollutants that can irritate the lungs, cause inflammation, and alter immune function. It can also increase susceptibility to respiratory infections.

People who are particularly vulnerable to wildfire smoke exposures are:

- Children under the age of 18
- Adults over the age of 65
- Pregnant women
- People with chronic health conditions such as heart or lung disease, including asthma and diabetes
- People recovering from a respiratory illness

The U.S. Forest Service and EPA operate a joint [AirNow Fire and Smoke Map](#) to map wildfire smoke and resulting air quality impacts in your area. This Fire and Smoke Map also includes past smoke history and actions you should take to reduce risk in the case of poor air quality. You can also use the [Air Quality Index \(AQI\)](#) to check the air quality in your area.

For monitoring and managing wildfire smoke, the U.S. Interagency [Wildland Fire Air Quality Program and Smoke Outlooks](#) website offers a range of tools and resources. It provides access to real-time smoke forecasts, air quality data, and health advisories, allowing you to understand and mitigate the impact of wildfire smoke on your health and environment.

To further protect yourself from extreme heat and poor air quality, [Heat.gov](#), developed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, is an interagency partnership offering tools and information to help individuals and communities prepare for and respond to extreme heat events. It includes heat health warnings, heat risk assessments, and guidance on developing heat response plans to protect public health and safety. Similarly, the [National Weather Service HeatRisk](#) is another tool that provides real-time information on heat risks across the US, including heat index forecasts and alerts.

If wildfire smoke is affecting the air quality, wearing an N95 or KN95 mask can help protect you. It is important that there is a tight seal around the nose and mouth. Using a cloth mask over an N95 mask can help ensure a tighter seal. There are no N95 or KN95 masks approved for use by children, so the CDC recommends keeping kids indoors as much as possible during a wildfire smoke event.

If it is still safe to stay at your home, creating a “clean air room” can also reduce your exposure to wildfire smoke. Clean air rooms are most helpful for individuals at higher risk from the effects of wildfire smoke like children, older adults, or individuals with heart disease or breathing problems. The EPA has helpful instructions on how to do so [here](#). To further protect yourself when returning home, it's important to filter the air with an air cleaner running at the highest fan setting. The [California Air Resources Board](#) recommends a list of air cleaners to help filter pollutants from wildfire smoke. If an air cleaner is not available or affordable for you, the [EPA provides instructions](#) on how to make a do-it-yourself air cleaner.

For more information on protecting yourself from wildfire smoke, [visit the CDC website](#).

### *[Insurance Information and Tips](#)*

During Colorado’s historic wildfires in 2020, the Colorado Division of Insurance (DOI) and the Rocky Mountain Insurance Association (RMIA) shared insurance advice on evacuations, filing claims, and financial preparedness. In addition to the practical tips below, here are three key

reminders, whether you have been evacuated, are under a pre-evacuation alert, or have already suffered some kind of loss due to a wildfire.

- **Know your policy** - If you don't have a copy of your policy, contact your agent or company and request it.
- **Keep your receipts** - If you are evacuated or displaced for a period of time, be sure to keep copies of all restaurant, hotel, and other living expenses incurred because you cannot go home.
- **Contact your state insurance agency with concerns and questions** – While claims need to be filed with the insurance companies, your state insurance agency can assist consumers with questions about insurance and the claims process.

### **Insurance Evacuation & Claims Advice**

If you are under a mandatory evacuation order, here's what you need to know about putting safety first and what to expect from your insurance coverage and claims filing process.

- First and foremost, if you are ordered to evacuate, you need to leave your residence immediately. Listen to orders from local authorities.
- Contact your insurance agent or company immediately to let them know where you are staying and to help you with coverage or claims questions. They can also help assist you with lodging options.
- Most insurance policies cover additional living expenses if you are under a mandatory evacuation and are unable to live in your house or apartment because of a fire or other covered peril. Most policies will reimburse you the difference between your additional living expenses and your normal living expenses, but policies have set limits on the amount they will pay and may be subject to a deductible. Check with your insurance professional about what coverage you have and keep receipts for expenses that may be reimbursed if you file a claim.
- If you are on pre-evacuation alert, it is critical to have an evacuation plan that includes identifying available lodging options such as family or friends, local hotels, shelter locations, insurance assistance with lodging, and pet shelters.
- Take photos or videos of personal possessions, particularly antiques, artwork or custom/expensive items. Or if you have time, make a more complete home inventory that lists, or has pictures or videos of, the contents of your home or apartment. It's easy to get overwhelmed, but most insurance companies now have apps to help simplify the process. You can add digital photos and scan in receipts, along with your room-by room online inventory. **But only do these things if you have plenty of time -- put safety FIRST.**



## *Returning Home After a Fire*

- **Make sure it is safe** - Do not enter your damaged home or apartment unless the fire department and local emergency management officials say that it is safe. It is important to understand the risk to your safety and health even after the fire is extinguished. The soot and dirty water left behind may contain toxins that could make you sick. Be very careful if you go into your home and if you touch any fire-damaged items—make sure to follow the advice of local health and emergency management officials.
- **Protect your health** - Avoid hot ash, charred trees, smoldering debris and live embers. The ground may contain heat pockets that can burn you or spark another fire. When cleaning, wear protective clothing – including a long-sleeved shirt, long pants, work gloves and sturdy thick-soled shoes – during clean-up efforts. Use a respirator to limit your exposure, and wet debris to minimize breathing in dust particles. People with asthma, COPD and/or other lung conditions should take precautions in areas with poor air quality, as it can worsen symptoms.
- **Don't delay** - Once the danger has passed, if your property has been damaged due to fire and/or smoke, don't wait -- start the claim process by calling your insurance company or agent. Contact the DOI if you need the contact information for your company or agent.
- **Document/mitigate the damage** - If the damage to your home is extensive, start taking photos of the property and documenting what was lost. Protect from further damage by placing tarps on roofs or boarding up windows, but don't begin repairs without contacting your insurance company.
  - **Post-Disaster Claims Guide** - Information from the DOI & the National Association of Insurance Commissioners (NAIC)
  - **How to file a property claim** - Information from RMIA
  - **How to file an auto insurance claim** - Information from RMIA
- **Save receipts** - Begin saving receipts for any money that you spend related to the fire loss. The receipts may be needed later by the insurance company and to prove any losses claimed on your income tax.
- **Verify public adjusters** - In the aftermath of a disaster like a wildfire, public adjusters may contact you if you have suffered damage to your home. You are not required to hire a public adjuster, but if you do, make sure he or she is licensed and reputable – check references. If possible, hire an adjuster based in your state. Your state insurance agency licenses public adjusters and consumers can call them to verify a license. Public adjusters work on behalf of a consumer and often charge a percentage of the claim amount. The fee is agreed upon in the contract between the public adjuster and the consumer. This cost is not included in the claim amount paid by the insurer.
- **Flood Insurance** - Now is the time to start thinking about flood insurance. Areas affected by wildfires are under a greater threat for flooding and mudslides due to the loss of vegetation, and the threat can last for many years as the area slowly recovers. Find

information about flood insurance and the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) at [floodsmart.gov](https://www.floodsmart.gov), or call the NFIP at 800-427-4661.

If you have any questions about insurance - your policy, how things work, how to file a claim or just how to get ahold of your company or agent - contact your state insurance agency.

### *IRS Post-Disaster Scam Tips*

Criminals and scammers often try to take advantage of generous taxpayers who want to help disaster victims. Everyone should be vigilant as these scams often pop up after wildfires.

#### **How the Scams Start**

These disaster scams normally start with unsolicited contact. The scammer contacts their intended victim by telephone, social media, email, or in-person. Scammers also use a variety of tactics to lure information out of people.

#### **Here are some tips to help avoid becoming a victim:**

- Some thieves pretend they are from a charity. Bogus websites use names that are similar to legitimate charities. They do this to trick people into sending money or providing personal financial information.
- Do not give out personal financial information to anyone who solicits a contribution. This includes things like Social Security numbers or credit card and bank account numbers and passwords.
- Scammers even claim to be working for - or on behalf of - the IRS. The thieves say they can help victims file casualty loss claims and get tax refunds.
- Instead, you can call the IRS toll-free disaster assistance line at 866-562-5227. Phone assistants will answer questions about tax relief or disaster-related tax issues.

## Local Resources

### *If You Need Emergency Assistance*

**Emergency Medical Assistance:** Please dial 9-1-1.

**Emergency Shelter:** Locate options by zip code by visiting the [American Red Cross, Salvation Army](#), or by texting SHELTER and your zip code (for example, "SHELTER 01234") to 4FEMA (43362). Para Español, envía un mensaje de texto con "REFUGIO" y tu código postal a 4FEMA (43362). Standard text message rates apply. You can also download the [FEMA Mobile App](#) to find open shelters.

**Immediate Needs:** The best place to find the most up-to-date information about evacuations, credentials, and resources is through your local county emergency management's office. The FEMA Helpline (1-800-621-3362 / TTY (800) 462-7585) may be able to provide additional referrals.

### *Post Offices and Receiving Your Mail*

Constituents who have been evacuated should check with their local county for the most up-to-date information, or [check the U.S. Postal Service's website](#).

USPS has been receiving increased notifications of mail theft. If you are a victim of mail theft, please report the incident to your local law enforcement authorities and the United States Postal Inspection Service (USPIS).

### *Voter Registration, Mail-in-Ballots, Marriage Licenses, and Vehicle Registration and Titles*

Constituents who need to replace any of the above documents, should contact their local County Clerk and Recorder's office.

# Major Disaster Assistance Programs

## *Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)*

FEMA coordinates across federal agencies to help state, local, tribal and territorial governments prepare for, respond to, and recover from wildfires nationwide. Depending on the severity of the wildfires and the extent of damage caused, the state may request a Major Disaster Declaration from FEMA and the President. This Declaration may include several forms of individual assistance, however the types of assistance activated are dependent on the nature of the disaster and what is needed. Individual assistance can include disaster housing assistance, crisis counseling, legal services, disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, grants to cover needs unmet by insurance, and disaster-related unemployment insurance.

If you need assistance, start by registering at <https://www.disasterassistance.gov/> to see if your address has been declared for Individual Assistance. If you have a speech disability or hearing loss and use TTY, call 1-800-462-7585. Para Español: [www.disasterassistance.gov/es](http://www.disasterassistance.gov/es) o llame al 800-621-3362. You can also contact my office to determine whether a Major Disaster has been declared for a fire in your area.

Please have the following information available when you call or visit:

- A phone number and a reliable alternative in case FEMA needs to call you back
- Address of the damaged property
- Annual household income
- Social Security number
- Bank account information (or direct deposit information)
- Insurance information (if you have insurance)
- Brief description of damages
- Current mailing address

Government disaster assistance only covers basic needs and usually will not compensate you for your entire loss. If you have insurance, the government may help pay for basic needs not covered under your insurance policy.

## *Small Business Administration (SBA)*

Depending on post-disaster conditions and severity, the SBA can offer low-interest disaster loans. These loans are not just for small businesses. They are available to qualifying businesses of all sizes, private non-profit organizations, homeowners, and renters. SBA disaster loans can be used to repair or replace the following items damaged or destroyed in a declared disaster: real estate, personal property, machinery and equipment, and inventory and business assets.

Learn more online: <https://www.sba.gov/funding-programs/disaster-assistance>

The process to apply for disaster assistance is simple. To qualify, your business or home must be in an affected area as stated by a disaster declaration at <https://lending.sba.gov/search-disaster/>.

- **Step 1:** Check disaster declarations
  - See if the SBA has issued a disaster declaration in your area
  - *If this hasn't happened yet, check back – it's possible a declaration hasn't been requested yet but will still come*
- **Step 2:** Apply for a disaster loan
  - Loans are available for businesses and homes affected by disaster
- **Step 3:** Check your status
  - Log into your account and check your email for updates

### *United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)*

The USDA has several disaster assistance programs for crop and livestock losses; to rehabilitate farmland, watersheds, and forests; and to provide support for rural businesses and homes. This includes the [Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honey Bees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program](#) (ELAP), which provides assistance to eligible producers for losses due to disease and certain adverse weather events or loss conditions, and also covers the cost of transporting feed for livestock that rely on grazing.

You can review [their disaster resources here](#), and you can find your local Farm Service Agency office (by county) [here](#).

### *Internal Revenue Service (IRS)*

Special tax law provisions may help taxpayers and businesses recover financially from the impact of a disaster, especially when the federal government declares their location to be a major disaster area. Depending on the circumstances, the IRS may grant additional time to file returns and pay taxes. Both individuals and businesses in a federally declared disaster area can get a faster refund by claiming losses related to the disaster on the tax return for the previous year, usually by filing an amended return.

For more information from the IRS regarding assistance during a disaster, please visit [IRS Disaster Assistance and Emergency Relief for Individuals and Businesses](#).

## Lost Document Replacement

We understand that when evacuating, especially with short or no notice, you may have left some of your important documentation behind. If you have had any of the following documents destroyed due to wildfires in your area, contact your Representative's district office directly:

- ☐ Social Security card
- ☐ Passport
- ☐ Naturalization card
- ☐ Tax returns
- ☐ Military records

For initial information on lost document replacement, please see the resources below:

Document	Resources to Replace
Birth and Death Certificates	Varies by state; call your Representative's district office for assistance
Lost Green Card	Visit <a href="https://www.uscis.gov/">https://www.uscis.gov/</a> and complete Form I-90, application to replace a permanent resident card, and file it online or by mail. Call 800-375-5283 to check application status.
Driver's License	Varies by state; visit your state's DMV website or call your Representative's district office for assistance
Medicare Cards	Visit <a href="https://www.ssa.gov/benefits/medicare/">https://www.ssa.gov/benefits/medicare/</a> or call 800-772-1213 (TTY) 800-325-0778
Social Security Card	Visit <a href="https://www.ssa.gov/">https://www.ssa.gov/</a> or call 800-772-1213 (TTY) 888-874-7793
Military Records	Visit <a href="https://www.archives.gov/contact">https://www.archives.gov/contact</a> or call 866-272-6272
Passport	Visit <a href="https://travel.state.gov/content/travel.html">https://travel.state.gov/content/travel.html</a> or call 1-877-487-2778 or (TTY) 888-874-7793
U.S. Tax Returns	Visit <a href="https://www.irs.gov/individuals/get-transcript">https://www.irs.gov/individuals/get-transcript</a> or call 800-829-1040