WILDFIRES
PREVENTION AND FIRST RESPONSE

INSTRUCTIONS

FIRST THINGS FIRST

First things first

The first thing to do if you see a brush fire is to phone the Emergency Line (112) and report where the fire is and describe the surroundings. Remember that you can always phone again to say help is not needed if the situation changes. If there are people in the area who may be in danger from the fire, alert them immediately. Size up the situation. If circumstances permit, try to fight the fire, but think of your own safety and do not take risks. Approach the fire with the wind at your back so that you can see the extent of the fire and are free to act: thick smoke from wildfires can be fatal. Fire-beaters, shovels or other tools, and water, should always be available. If the fire cannot be put out, for example because of high wind, try to create a firebreak at some distance downwind, for example by wetting dry vegetation or clearing it away.

PHONE 112
Phone 112 and report the position of the fire. Fire can flare up in a very short time.

ALERT OTHER PEOPLE
Tell others in the area about the fire.

MAKE THE RIGHT MOVES
Doing the right thing from the outset can make all the difference. Smoke can be dangerous. Always put your own safety first.

EVACUATION PLANS

Evacuation plans

Make a plan in advance on where you can go if a fire breaks out. In dry conditions and strong wind, a wildfire can spread quickly and cut off escape routes. Find the ways leading out of the area and where safer places can be found. The choice of route will depend on the direction of the wind. Remember to alert everyone in the area if you see a fire and be aware of how many people are in your group. Shout “FIRE”. Have emergency equipment ready according to the circumstances.

ROUTES
Be aware of routes out of the area, both for vehicles and people on foot.

ASSEMBLY
Decide in advance on where to assemble if an emergency arises.

WATER
Be aware of streams and lakes in your area, and also of places with little vegetation.

REDUCING POTENTIAL WILDFIRE FUEL

Ways of reducing potential fuel for wildfires and containing the spread of fires

There are various ways of limiting the amount of vegetation that could serve as fuel for wildfires, including mowing, or allowing livestock to graze on, unused hayfields and roadsides, growing grass for hay in separate belts, having firebreaks at regular intervals through woodland or planting fire-resistant trees such as aspens or larch from which dead or dry lower branches have been trimmed. Remember to keep brushwood away from buildings and electricity lines that cross woodland. It is advisable to have a margin of up to 1.5 m with little or no vegetation around buildings. Be careful not to let piles of rubbish develop near trees or buildings. Petrol (gasoline), gas cylinders, tyres and fertilizers must be stored in safe places that are easily accessible. Fire can spread quickly through dry grass, lupins or other brushwood, moss and woodland. Places that offer the best protection from fire or hinder the further spread of a fires are called fire-lines or fire-breaks. Examples are roads, tracks, rivers and streams, lakes and ditches or strips of bare ground. Such lines form containment areas of various sizes. Inside each containment area, all the vegetation can burn. Find out about the containment areas and fire lines in your neighbourhood.

GRASS AND SCRUB
Keep grass and scrub short by mowing or allowing livestock grazing.

ACROSS WOODLAND
Create firebreak belts with minimal vegetation through woodland.

TREE BELTS
Plant belts of fire-resistant tree species.

--

HAVING FIRES IN VEGETATED AREAS

Having fires in vegetated areas

When grass and brushwood are dry, it takes only a small spark to start a fire. In long periods of dry weather and wind, special care must be taken when using machinery or having fires outside. Wildfires in Iceland have been caused by cigarettes, fireworks, car engines and disposable grills (barbecues), to name just a few examples. You should preferably use the purpose-built fireplaces that are found on many beauty spots and hiking routes; otherwise, outdoor fires should only be lit in open areas where there is no combustible material nearby (dry grass, leaves, timber or plants). Sparks and burning material can be blown from the fire and set fire to dry brush, even at considerable distances. Always have a shovel and a bucket of water to hand. It is best if one person takes responsibility for putting out the fire. Do not leave the site until the fire has burned right down and gone cold. Douse all the embers with water, turning over the half-burned pieces of wood or coal and checking, by holding your hand above them, whether any heat is still being given off. Then spread sand or soil over the top and mix it in with the fuel fragments and ash. Keep fires as small as possible, and take account of local conditions. If you plan a larger fire, you should obtain permission from the local fire service. Do not put disposable grills directly onto grass, leaves or other combustible material: they should be on a base

of stones or sand. Keep an eye on the grill while it is in use, and douse the coals with water after use. All larger grills must be checked over regularly; when a gas grill has not been used for some time, the gas pipe may need replacing.

HOT MACHINES
Hot surfaces can ignite dry vegetation.

CIGARETTES
Fires are often caused by cigarettes.

DISPOSABLE GRILLS
Put them on a proper base.

--

PLANNED FORESTS

Planned forests

Man-made woods and forest plantations involve work by the National Forestry Service, various NGOs, the owners of holiday cottages, forestry associations, farmers and other people. When a forest is planted out, it is important to break it into fire-containment areas with fire lines (fire-breaks). Divisions can also be made by planting belts of deciduous species that are relatively fire-resistant. Natural features of the landscape, and roads and paths, can also form firebreaks. It is important to have escape routes from forests, with more than one possibility of getting out of them quickly in the event of a fire in case one exit is blocked. Access to water is important; specialists should be consulted when the plan is drawn up. Consultation at the planning stage will also make for smoother communication between the various parties if fire breaks out in the forest. In all forestry projects, fire-containment areas and fire lines must be included in the plan and in practice.
Seek the necessary information.

FIRE-CONTAINMENT AREAS
Forests shall be divided into fire-containment areas.

WATER
Access to water is important all year round.

ESCAPE ROUTES
Having more than one route means enhanced safety.

--
EQUIPMENT FOR FIGHTING WILDFIRES

Equipment for fighting wildfires

Where there is a high level of risk, the right equipment must be available at all times. The fire brigade may have to travel a long distance, or be hampered by difficult terrain, so the right first response is very important. A heavy-duty pump (manure pump), primed ready for use and full of water in a

location free of frost, can make all the difference. It takes only a few minutes to harness it to a tractor, and a powerful tractor will be able to take the pump across rough ground. Tanks of water, with pumps and hoses ready in frost-free locations, can play the same role if they are brought to the fire by means of a tractor. A tiller can be used in frost-free conditions to create fire-breaks; ploughs and fire-beaters are useful for preventing the spread of grass fires. Properly designed reservoirs are frost-free both winter and summer and should be accessible in forestry areas.
If sufficient water can be obtained from natural sources (lakes and rivers), measures must be taken to ensure access.

TOOLS
Various tools can be effective in fighting fires.

MANURE PUMPS
Manure pumps have proved effective in fighting wildfires.

WATER RESERVOIRS
Reservoirs should be accessible in forestry areas.

--
HOLIDAY COTTAGE OWNERS

Holiday cottage owners

It is important to have a safety margin of up to 1.5 m around the cottage and outbuildings in which vegetation is kept down to a minimum. If the cottage is on a slope, the margin below it must be wider. Where it is not practical to mow or cut grass and shrubs, letting horses or sheep graze there for a short time can be a good way of limiting vegetation. How you treat the surroundings, and the woodland, is important too. Do not let rubbish accumulate beneath the veranda of the cottage or keep petrol, gas cylinders, tyres or fertilizers under or next to the building. Cultivated land can be divided up by laying gravel paths or ensuring growth-free firebreaks. It is important to plan possible evacuation routes and to have equipment to hand for fighting wildfires.

GAS AND FUEL
Store gas cylinders and fuel tanks in a safe place.

WATER
Make sure you have easy access to water.

FIRE PREVENTION
Preventive measures indoors are also important.

--
BASIC EQUIPMENT

Basic equipment for fighting wildfires

Owners of land and holiday cottages must be prepared to deal quickly with minor brushwood fires: when fire breaks out, every second counts. Fire-beaters and access to a garden hose are absolutely

basic precautions. These should always be to hand in an accessible place, e.g. on the wall of a holiday cottage. Where there is an adequate water supply, it is a good idea to have a hose that will reach twice around the cottage with a quick tap connection. Where access to a water supply is not assured, it is sensible to set up a water-tank or reservoir so as to be able to protect buildings and the immediate surroundings and put out fires in their initial stages. It is sensible to have equipment such as goggles, gloves, face-masks and fire-resistant overalls and not to fight fires in clothing made of inflammable artificial fabrics. The safety of the people who fight the fire on site should always be the prime concern; where appropriate, call the fire brigade via the Emergency Line, 112.

FIRE-BEATERS
Always have fire-beaters to hand and ensure access to water.

ARTIFICIAL FABRICS
Remember: clothing made from artificial fabrics can catch fire easily. Natural materials are more fire-resistant.

CONDITIONS
The conditions will vary from case to case; assess them carefully and do not risk your life or the lives of others.