



A [wildfire](#) is an unplanned, unwanted fire burning in a natural area, such as a forest, grassland, or prairie. Wildfires can start from natural causes, such as lightning, but most are caused by humans, either accidentally or intentionally. Wildfires can damage natural resources, destroy homes, and threaten human lives and safety.

In 2024, a total of [6,935 lightning strikes](#) caused approximately [4.2 million acres of fires across the U.S.](#)

Most locations in downstate Illinois reference field or brush fires, in northern Illinois/Chicago, wildfires are known as "Prairie Fires. A prescribed fire is a controlled application of fire by a team of experts under specific weather conditions to restore health to the ecosystems that depend on fire. The future of Illinois' natural areas depend on repeated application of fire that maintains appropriate tree species and densities in our woodlands and keeps our wetland and grasslands under control.

- Just like for storms or snow, the National Weather Service issues fire watches and warnings
- If building, use fire-safe construction and remove brush from beside structures
- Dry debris in vents, eaves, or gutters can turn a spark into a fire or quickly bring flames into your home
- Plan escape routes and meeting locations
- Smoke from fires outside of Illinois can blow in and affect those with medical or respiratory challenges
- Create a Defensible Space: Clear vegetation 30 feet around your home, remove dead plants, leaves, and flammable materials from your yard and gutters
- Monitor Fire Conditions: Sign up for local emergency alerts and check daily fire danger ratings, especially during dry seasons and high winds
- Have Multiple Escape Routes: Plan and practice at least two evacuation routes from your neighborhood
- Emergency Kit Ready: Prepare a go-bag with N95 masks, medications, important documents, water, non-perishable food, and battery-powered radio
- Air Protection: Close all windows and doors if smoke is present, set AC to recirculate, and seal gaps under doors with damp towels if needed
- Evacuation Readiness: If ordered to evacuate, leave immediately. Take your emergency kit.
- Communication Plan: Establish an out-of-area contact and ensure all family members know the contact's number

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