

# FIRE PRIME

European Programme for Wildfire-Prepared Communities

## Wildfire Prevention and Responsibility Tool



FIREPRIME is a project by:



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# Background

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Wildfire damage to the built environment is not only caused by large forest fires. Even small wildfires can ignite buildings, also in areas often thought to be low-risk. Yet, in many European countries, wildfire mitigation is not supported by laws or policies. Instead, such efforts depend on voluntary efforts by individuals or communities.

At the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), where homes border forests and grasslands, responsibilities for fire prevention are often unclear. It is not always evident who should clear vegetation, maintain defensible space, or carry out other mitigation measures.

The tool introduced here was developed to help communities address these questions together through dialogue, imagination, and practical planning.

Using realistic wildfire scenarios, based on previous incidents and illustrating different possible outcomes, participants can better understand what a typical risk associated to wildfire can look like, which types of fires ignite buildings, and what factors lead to greater risk. This shared understanding helps guide discussions about what preventive actions are needed, how they should be implemented, and who should take responsibility for them.

## Want to read more?

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VERMINA PLATHNER, F., SJÖSTRÖM, J., & GRANSTRÖM, A. (2025).

*Early season wildfires pose the highest threat to buildings and people in Sweden.* Fire Safety Journal, 104457.

ERIKSSON, K., SJÖSTRÖM, J., & VERMINA PLATHNER, F. (2024).

*“This community will grow”—little concern for future wildfires in a dry and increasingly hotter Swedish rural community.* Regional Environmental Change, 24(2), 69.

VERMINA PLATHNER, F., SJÖSTRÖM, J., & GRANSTRÖM, A. (2023).

*Garden structure is critical for building survival in northern forest fires –An analysis using large Swedish wildfires.* Safety science, 157, 105928.

# Purpose

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This tool aims to help communities understand wildfire risk and share responsibility for prevention. Using scenario workshops, the tool invites residents, landowners, forest and agricultural industries and local authorities to reflect on their landscapes, habits, and collective preparedness.

The goal is to build mutual understanding and coordinated responsibility among those living in, working in or using the area. The procedure is intended to create a discussion around different types of responsibility (legal, self-imposed, expected, moral etc.).



# Mitigation strategies

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There are several mitigation strategies that can be discussed during the workshops. If the participants are not aware of what can be done to prevent building ignitions, this list of examples may help discussions.

## Fuel treatment

### **Remove or manage flammable vegetation**

Examples: Grazing, mechanical removal, or prescribed burns to remove e.g. surface fuels or increase crown base height

## Forest adaptation

### **Alter forest composition and/or structure**

Examples: Broadleaf inclusion in coniferous stands, restoring wetlands

## Home hardening

### **Fireproof buildings**

Examples: Build with non-combustible materials, change to emberproof vents, maintaining gutters

## Garden hardening

### **Preparing gardens against ignition risks**

Examples: Decreasing combustible garden vegetation and artificial fuel loads, redistributed storage, lawn management

## Community meas.

### **Preparing communities against ignition risks**

Examples: Management on community grounds, maintaining and gathering shared tools, maintaining fire places and shelters

## Education

### **Raise awareness and skills**

Examples: Rescue service visit to schools, municipal information of burning practices

## Incentives

### **Encourage safe practices**

Examples: Lower insurance premiums after risk-reduction measures

## Enforcement

### **Require safe practices**

Examples: Legislation, fire bans

# How to conduct the workshop

## Step 01

### Gather your group

Invite a mix of people who represent different perspectives of the community:

- Homeowners and residents
- Private landowners and farmers
- Fire and rescue service representatives
- Forestry companies
- Municipal or regional planners
- Environmental officers or NGOs
- Insurance representatives

## Step 02

### Introduce the purpose

Start with a short presentation (10–15 minutes) introducing the local wildfire context (past fires, vegetation types, weather patterns)

## Step 03

### Discuss the Scenarios

Divide into groups of 4-7 people each. Present each short scenario narrative describing a realistic fire ignition and its consequences. Use the images and maps printed on large papers placed on the table.

After reading each scenario aloud, ask participants:

- “What preventive measures could have been taken to avoid or reduce the spread?”
- “Who should take responsibility for those actions?”
- “What is needed to implement the proposed measures?”

Encourage open conversation and let participants build on each other's insights.

## Step 04

### Reflect and Summarize

End with a joint reflection:

- What did we learn about our community's vulnerabilities?
- Which actions could we take now — individually and together?
- Who needs to be involved next time?

Document key points and commitments on a shared board or poster. Consider repeating the workshop to track progress and update local strategies.

# Scenario 1

## Fire in the garden hedge

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Anita's house stands at the end of a tuja hedge, delineating the border between her and the neighbour's garden. The hedge acts both as a windbreak and a privacy screen for the property. The garden features a wide lawn, a paved patio next to the hedge, colourful flower beds, and a garden shed for tools and storage.

It is a perfect day for gardening. Anita has been tending her planting area using a gas burner to clear weeds between the patio stones. She steps into the shed to fetch her outdoor furniture. When she returns, she is shocked to see flames racing up the tuja hedge near the patio. She rushes to get the garden hose, but the fire is already intense, and her efforts are in vain. By the time the fire service arrives, the flames have swept along the hedge and reached the house.



# Scenario 2

## Spring grass burning

Magnus owns a small rural property in Långhult with a traditional cottage, a barn, and a tool shed. The cottage stands empty during winter, but each spring Magnus returns to prepare it for the summer season. His routine includes cleaning the house, clearing brush, and burning last year's dry grass, both in the meadow beyond the cottage and in the area between the barn and the house.

To the northwest lies a larger farm owned by Axel, whose fields are bordered by mixed forest.

Today is spring cleaning day. Midway through burning the grass, the wind shifts abruptly, driving a fast-moving flame front across the field toward Axel's hay barn. Magnus immediately begins extinguishing and calls emergency services, but before help arrives, the flames ignite a large pile of wooden planks stacked outside the barn. The plank fire then reaches the barn's eaves and threatens several gasoline containers that Axel had placed nearby for planned use that day.



# Scenario 3

## Lightning strike on a forest lot

North of Finsjö, small forest properties lie close together. To the southeast, Janne's lot in Kvarntorp begins with a young pine plantation where the ground is covered with heather. Further north, the forest has been recently logged. There, pine saplings compete with grass and ferns for sunlight.

This spring brought very little rainfall, and early summer has set records with temperatures exceeding 35 °C. Today, a thunderstorm sweeps in from the north. No rain falls, but lightning strikes a seed pine on Janne's clear-cut area. Wind fans open flames, which spread into the young pine stand. Emergency services are alerted when a Finsjö resident spots the smoke plume. By then, flames several meters high are racing through the heather and young forest, heading straight towards the residential area in Kvarntorp.



# Scenario 4

## Remote forest fire

South of Nybro stretches a rugged forest landscape of clear-cuts, dense pine with spruce understory, and dry heath rich in lichen and ladder fuels. Few forest roads cross the area, which is owned by both private landowners and Sveaskog.

By mid-July, after weeks of drought, Sweden's aerial firefighting resources are already strained by fires in the north. On July 19, smoke is reported west of Stora Galltjärn. Fire crews from Nybro head toward Vitstensmossen but struggle to locate the blaze, which has already spread south. Delays in access and hose-laying allow the fire to intensify before helicopter support arrives.

The fire is contained on July 21 after burning roughly 1,000 hectares. Two villages with about 450 residents were evacuated, and reinforcements from across southern Sweden joined the effort—though most arrived after the peak of the fire on July 19.



# Scenario 5

## Campfire remnants

After repeated appeals from the local community association (supported by the municipality), landowner Ove agreed to dedicate part of his land for a nature trail, including a wind shelter and fire pit in a scenic spot. The fire pit quickly became popular. Over the weekend, a group of scouts from Högsby camped at the shelter, and Ove could hear their songs echoing across the Togölen lake as he went to bed.

Now, on Monday afternoon, Ove is driving home from work when the fire department calls. Apparently, embers left from the weekend's campfire had been blown into the mossy ground behind the spruce slope, igniting a fire. It is now under control, but the tree stems on half a hectare of Ove's three-hectare spruce stand are blackened by the flames.



# Scenario 6

## Newly built homes

In 2021, Oskarshamn Municipality launched the development of the “Creative Homes” in Figeholm, on the property Hägnad 1:16. These homes offer residents the chance to live immersed in nature — just one step outside the door leads straight into the pine forest. The first homes are now complete, and five families have already moved in, with six more under construction nearby.

On a dry day in late May, a 12-year-old from one of the families is playing outside with steel wool and a lighter. A sudden gust of wind catches the flames, which spreads quickly uphill, with flames impinging on the façade of the house.

