



**Commissioner Adam H. Putnam**

*Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services*

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## Home Safe, Community Safe, Preparation is the Key

Most Floridians understand the concept of preparing for a storm, an incoming hurricane or the need for a tornado drill. When clouds roll in, we assess whether it's time to leave before the rain hits or make sure we carry our umbrella. When high winds and heavy rains threaten, we assess whether we should board up windows, sand bag perimeters or evacuate. Schools run drills so our children know exactly how to protect themselves if a tornado appears. But, very few individuals think of the importance of being prepared for the event of a wildfire until their community is threatened by fire.

Ready, Set, Go! is a fire preparedness education program, administered by the International Association of Fire Chiefs, that builds on the Firewise concept. The program calls on individuals and communities to not only understand the need for a defensible space around homes (at least 30 feet of non-combustible vegetation), but also the need for families to develop a comprehensive escape plan when threatened by fire. Families should develop plan of action in the event of a fire (READY), be prepared to put that plan into action and actually use it (SET) and depart at a safe time and pace with a predetermined destination (GO!). This means, understanding the present danger, taking action to prepare your home, and leaving the area when appropriate, rather than waiting until the last minute or for someone to knock on your door and ask you to evacuate immediately.

A family with a plan is less likely to depart without essential needs and with less panic, more likely have a pet plan in place and, in the event that all are not together, will be able to find each other because of a pre-appointed destination. They are also more apt to pull furniture away from windows, removed combustibles from around the house, turned on sprinklers and provide other property saving measures to aid firefighters in the firefighting effort.

A community with a plan is more resilient in the wake of a disaster and though fire is tragic, when



### **Want more information?**

For more information contact Samantha Quinn, Caloosahatchee Forestry Center Wildfire Mitigation Specialist at (239) 690-8018

more homeowners and business owners are prepared, the community can reduce the amount of destruction by reducing the risk of unnecessary hazards by creating defensible spaces and preparing for worst-case scenarios.

A recurring neighborhood example across America is the one-way in, one-way out style of neighborhood. In these neighborhoods, the lack of entry and exits for both residents and fire equipment limit the safety of everyone, and capacity to decrease the fire danger in a timely manner. However, the lack of entry and exit does not dictate that fire be certain disaster, if communities pre-plan to ensure a safer community. These are prime areas where it would be most prudent to be Firewise. Residents with cut green lawns and defensible spaces cleared of combustible vegetation give firefighters a chance to turn the tide on a wildfire. Homes with fire rated roofs, non-combustible decks and covered vents aid in protecting the structure as well.

Firewise homeowners who take measures to increase safety on their own property and encourage neighbors to do the same lend a helping hand to the community at large. In turn, the fire professionals gain a leg-up in emergency response. Jerry Horton, Florida Forest Service, Field Operations says that “By being Firewise, homeowners are not only providing safety to themselves but providing safety to the first responders that serve them.”

The Ready, Set, Go! Program adds another layer of strength to an already Firewise homeowner in defense of wildfire danger. For a full set of check lists and further information on the program go to <http://www.freshfromflorida.com/Divisions-Offices/Florida-Forest-Service/Wildland-Fire/Fire-Safety/Ready-Set-Go!-Resources> and <http://www.wildlandfirersg.org/Resident> and download your Wildland Fire Action Guide.

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The Florida Forest Service, a division of the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, manages more than 1 million acres of state forests, provides management assistance on more than 17 million acres of private and community forests, while protecting homes, forestland and natural resources from the devastating effects of wildfire on more than 26 million acres. Learn more at [FloridaForestService.com](http://FloridaForestService.com).

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