

Go!

Where there is smoke, there is fire. Don't wait until you can see the fire or try to anticipate what it will do. **Go!** Use your escape routes and leave the area immediately.

If the fire is near:

- Avoid trails cutting across hillsides (mid-slope) if possible and avoid areas of heavy vegetation.
- Be alert for wildlife escaping from the fire – bears, snakes, mountain lions, etc.
- Don't worry about getting back to your car or your original departure point. Get to the closest safe area. This may be a paved road, ranger station, parking lot or campground.
- Use your cell phone to let someone know where you are and let them know when you are safe.

If the fire is very close:

- Leave your equipment behind and run to safety. Your equipment can be replaced, your life can't.
- Find the closest safe area and use your cell phone to let someone know you are there.
- If you see firefighters, run to them.
- If law enforcement or firefighting aircraft are passing overhead, wave bright-colored clothing or use a mirror to attract their attention. They can let firefighters know there are people in danger.



If you are trapped by a wildfire:

- Do not attempt to run through flames to escape.
- Look for safety/refuge areas. This could be a wide, sandy or rocky beach next to a river or stream. A large area of rocks or gravel will provide a buffer from the fire and an open field with little or no grass or other vegetation can protect you from the most intense flames.
- Rivers, streams, ponds and lakes also offer protection.
- If the situation presents itself, the safest refuge from a wildfire is an area that has already burned. It will be hot, dirty and uncomfortable, but because the vegetation has already been consumed by the fire, it is a relatively safe refuge.
- Be prepared to withstand very uncomfortable conditions for an extended period of time. It will be extremely hot.
- Smoke may completely obscure your surroundings, so it is very important to remain in your refuge. Trying to move under smoky conditions could cause you to become disoriented and move into further danger.
- Embers and firebrands will be flying through the air. Protect yourself with long pants and sleeves, a dry bandana over your mouth and nose, and if you have them, a hat, goggles and gloves.

Using the trails in Ventura County is both a pleasure and a privilege. But to enjoy nature at its most beautiful, trail users must also be aware of nature at its most fierce. Wildfires are a reality in Ventura County, but with a few simple precautions, wildland enthusiasts can explore the hills, canyons and mountains knowing they are prepared.

When it's time for your next trip down a Ventura County trail, pack your gear, grab your water bottles and remember:

Ready, Set, Go!

For more information on wildfire preparedness, go to:

Ventura County Fire Department

165 Durlay Ave. • Camarillo, CA 93010 • (805) 389-9769
<http://vcreadysetgo.org>.

Ready, Set, Go! for Trail Users is endorsed by:



Protect Yourself Against Wildfires!

Ready, Set, Go

For Trail Users



Ventura County is a trail-lover's paradise. From walks on the beach, to urban paths and back-country trails, walkers, hikers, mountain-bikers and equestrians have many options for exercising in a natural setting. Many of these paths and trails are either in the wildland urban interface – a place where development meets a natural area – or in the wildland itself. Anyone on a trail during times of high fire danger could be at risk from wildfires.

Fortunately, the **Ready, Set, Go!** Trail Users program provides many ways to prepare and protect against wildfires.

The Ready, Set, Go! Trail Users program is about being prepared (ready), situational awareness – knowing what's going on around you (set) – and getting out of harm's way (go!). By following a few simple steps, trail users can enjoy the natural beauty of Ventura County without putting themselves in the path of a wildfire.

To prepare against a wildfire, it's necessary to know something about wildfires themselves. It's important to remember that wildfires are a natural part of our environment. Although some wildfires start naturally, the majority are caused by human activity. We know wildfires are most likely to occur when the weather is hot, relative humidity is low and the vegetation is dry. In Ventura County, these conditions usually occur between May and early November.

The intensity of wildfires is influenced by three factors: vegetation, topography and weather. The topography of an area also affects fire behavior. Fire burns very rapidly uphill, much faster than a person can run. Steep hillsides and canyons channel fire and are consumed rapidly. Firefighters refer to these vertical canyons as chimneys for a good reason; that's exactly how they direct a fire. Vegetation ignites easily during hot and dry weather conditions, and wind spreads a fire more quickly. Our hot and dry east winds – Santa Ana conditions – can push a fire even faster.

Knowing these factors, anyone using a trail can make informed decisions on when, where, or even if, they should start their trip. The best thing a trail user can do is be informed, be prepared and be aware. The **Ready, Set, Go!** Trail Users program can help.

Ready

If you are planning a trail excursion, especially an overnight one, you must be prepared for the possibility of a wildfire. The preparations you make before you leave could save your life.

- Research conditions in the area where you will be before you leave. Consider changing your plans if high fire danger exists.
- Take plenty of water with you. It is important to stay adequately hydrated under normal conditions. It is even more important in the hot and dry conditions normally associated with fire weather.
- Before you leave, tell someone when and where you will be. This is especially important if you will be travelling alone. Be sure to take a fully charged cell phone and some sort of signaling device with you. This could be as simple as a whistle or a mirror.
- Take protective clothing including long pants and long sleeves made of a natural fiber, a bandana to filter smoky air and a hat to keep embers from falling on your head.
- Have good maps with you and pre-plan your escape routes. A fire could block your path and prevent you from going out the same way you came in.
- Smoking is highly discouraged in any area prone to wildfires and may be prohibited. Matches and discarded smoking materials are obvious sources for accidental fire starts.
- Special care should be taken if you plan to use firearms in wildland areas. Always obey local regulations regarding the use of firearms and be aware that ejected brass, muzzle flashes and ricochets can all ignite dry vegetation.
- Make sure there are emergency supplies of food and water in your car. In the more remote areas of the county, even if you get off the trail ahead of a wildfire, you could be evacuated to a safe area with limited resources.
- Back your car into a parking space at the trailhead and try to park away from grass or brush that could carry a fire to your vehicle. By backing in, you make it easier to drive out if smoke or embers are obscuring visibility.

If you plan to stay overnight and will be cooking in a wildland area, you must take special precautions.

- Follow all regulations regarding cooking and campfires.
- If you are using a camp stove, make sure that it is properly positioned and away from other combustible materials.
- When making a campfire, use the designated campfire rings. If permitted in a remote area, choose an open, cleared area, away from other combustibles.
- Do not build a campfire under a tree or bush.
- Make only the size fire you need. Large bonfire-type fires cannot be safely controlled.
- Never leave a campfire unattended.
- Even well-tended campfires produce embers. Be aware of any embers escaping your fire and extinguish them immediately.
- Never make a campfire in dry, windy conditions. The wind can blow embers into nearby vegetation.
- Always be certain your campfire is fully extinguished and cold before leaving your camping area. Coals can smolder under ashes for a long time after you think the fire is out. It is important to carefully stir the ashes and wait for the fire to go cold before leaving.



Set

It is important to maintain situational awareness because wildfires move very quickly and erratically.

Firefighters are taught to always maintain situational awareness. This means to be constantly aware of everything that's going on around them – in front, behind and to the sides. This is especially important under wildfire conditions because wildfires move very quickly and erratically.

Trail users can practice situational awareness as well. It starts with noticing the weather and conditions around you. In late summer or early fall, vegetation is at its driest levels. Hot afternoon temperatures, especially on south-facing slopes, make the vegetation most susceptible to ignition. If low relative humidity and strong winds are also present, the fire danger is extremely high. Anyone on a trail must be extremely cautious under these conditions because a spark from metal against a rock, a poorly tended campfire or a carelessly discarded cigarette could start a major wildfire.

When there is high fire danger, trail users must increase their level of situational awareness. If smoke is seen, they must take immediate action to protect themselves. If you see smoke:

- Don't dismiss or ignore it. Wildfires move very rapidly.
- Note the direction of the wind. Determining which way the wind might drive the fire will help you plan your escape.
- Consult your maps to determine your best escape route away from the fire. Never travel towards the fire, even if that route looks like the fastest way out.

