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Quarterly Quote

*"TCFSWG gave us the guidance we needed. They were amazing to work with. We're extremely happy with the whole process."*  
V.C. property owner



**FIRE SEASON, NOT JUST SUMMER ANYMORE!**

Fire season, which varies in timing and duration based on location, is the time of year when wildfires are most likely to ignite, spread, and affect resources. Fire season in the West is increasingly stretching year-round, and recently some devastating forest and prairie fires have erupted in the fall and winter. Over 1,084 structures were lost, and one fatality occurred near Superior, CO in a suburban wildfire on January 1, 2022, resulting in the evacuation of tens of thousands of people and billions of dollars in damages. On December 1st, 2021, a prairie fire swept through the community of Denton, MT

destroying over 28 structures. On the same day, a subdivision on the southeast side of Great Falls lost 22 structures from a wind-driven wildfire.

The similarities of these incidents include fast-moving wildfire driven by strong winds, unseasonably warm temperatures, and dry conditions. These short-term events are exacerbated by the fact that suppression resources are more limited in the winter. Increase in large fire activity and acres burned have been driven by rising temperatures, reduced winter snowpack, earlier snow melt, reduced summer precipitation and drier and windier condi-

tions. At the Helena Regional Airport, the temps on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2023, reached 60 degrees F, breaking a previous record set in 1939.

We may not be able to control weather patterns, but property owners can control the amount of flammable materials that lead to ignition and fire spread. Home hardening and creating defensible space around a home's ignition zone should be on everyone's to-do list. Don't become complacent and think that what happened in Colorado or Denton couldn't happen here.

Any time of year is a good time to plan and do mitigation!

**2023  
A LOOK AT THE #'S**

Risk Assessments	151
Project Plans	64
Projects Complete	56
Hazardous Fuels Reduction Acres	224
Grant Funds for Mitigation	\$388,442
Property Owner \$ Match	\$271,972

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**HOMEOWNER INSURANCE CONCERNS**

After recent massive wildfires across the Western United States, several insurance companies are choosing not to renew certain home insurance policies due to a property's risk of wildfire. While we were aware this was happening in CA, OR, and CO, we are disappointed to learn that some property owners in the tri-county area

have been notified that their home insurance policies will be dropped as well.

When insurers pull out of an area, residents without access to property and casualty insurance are left holding their own risk; and paying the

price if a disaster strikes. The state-wide organization, Firesafe Montana, is addressing this issue and working closely with a stakeholder group including insurance representatives, the Commission of Securities and Insurance Office and property owners.

This emerging trend provides even more reasons to reduce risks around the home ignition zone.



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**Protect Your Home From Wildfire**  
Free Wildfire Risk Assessments  
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Create Ignition Resistant Space

“Pile and Burn” is a term used to describe the act of thinning, pruning, and removing trees and vegetation to reduce hazardous fuels. Once the trees have been cut, the material is limbed and sawed into slash (woody debris, branches, brush, logs) and stacked into slash piles for burning. Burning piles during winter, when temperatures are lower and humidity levels are higher can create a safer environment and reduce the risk of burn piles escaping. However, even burning in the winter requires proper planning and coordination including how the slash pile is constructed and weather conditions on the day of burning.

Here are some important reminders for slash pile burning: Choose an appropriate location for the piles; select an area clear of overhanging branches, power lines, and other flammable materials. Gather the slash and arrange it into a tepee-like shape to allow for good airflow. Start with larger pieces of wood at the bottom and layer smaller branches, leaves, and other debris on top. Once the piles are ready to burn, check your county regulations and restrictions, and obtain any necessary permits.

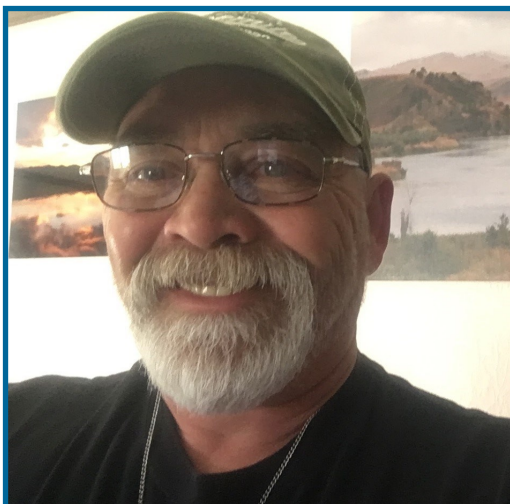
For additional guidance: <https://www.montana.edu/extension/forestry/publications/pile%20burning.pdf>



## MEET TCFSWG FUELS SPECIALIST, ROCKY INFANGER

Rocky Infanger has a long association with emergency services, wildland fire fighting, and wildfire mitigation. As the owner of Mitigation in Motion, he spends a lot of time on the ground working with property owners conducting TCFSWG’s wildfire risk assessments and preparing fuels mitigation plans.

Rocky has 39 years of volunteer firefighting experience with the Wolf Creek/Craig Fire Services Area, of which he has served as chief for 19 years. He is active in multiple organizations including the L&C County Rural Fire Council (secretary/treasurer), the L&C Local Emergency Planning Committee (vice president) and



FireSafe Montana (president). Perhaps his most important role is husband to his wife Michele and father of their three grown sons.

Wildfire mitigation has been a concern and priority for him since becoming a volunteer firefighter. From his frontline experiences, he has seen firsthand the growth of the wildland/urban interface and the need for homeowners to take action. When asked what keeps him up at night, he says “People who are not prepared!”

Rocky is a strong advocate for fuels mitigation, home hardening, and evacuation preparedness. His message to interface homeowners is to “Be Prepared! Take action and do your part to reduce the impact of a fire near you. We all have a responsibility to ensure our own safety. It’s never too late to act!”

Working in wildfire mitigation allows Rocky to meet new people, see new places, and educate them on the importance of taking action and being responsible stewards of the land they own. He stresses that fuels mitigation not only helps a landowner, but also their neighbors. “Hazardous fuels ... it’s a shared risk we all must become responsible for, and do our part to ensure our safety.”

Thank you Rocky for your work and commitment to TCFSWG and wildfire mitigation!