



Wildfires and Wood Chips: What You Should Know

Embers are the biggest cause of home ignitions in wildfire events, and they can travel over a mile from the wildfire. **Embers that land on wood chips or other natural mulches can ignite a home if that mulch is too close to the house.**

How close is too close?

Flammable materials, including wood chips, **should never be closer to your home than five (5) feet.** Within that five-foot zone, use non-combustible materials like gravel, rock, pavers, or concrete.



Above: this local landowner used small amounts of wood chips at the base of the plants to block weeds and keep the soil moist, and then used rock between plants to create a beautiful and ember-resistant landscape next to their home.



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Two examples of the danger of wood chips and other flammable mulches within five feet of a home or other building. Above: the IBHS test home was bombarded with embers, which ignited the mulch next to the house (and the pine needles in the gutters). Below: after slowly smoldering for hours in the wood chips, the fire ignited the siding of this home. Until the siding caught fire, the homeowner probably had no idea there was a problem.



Make sure your home and property is ready for fire season! Sign up for a free risk assessment from the Okanogan Conservation District. We'll help you identify and prioritize what to do. Sign up at www.okanogancd.org/wildfire or call 509-422-0855 today.



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So where can you use wood chips?

The best place for wood chips when you are landscaping in fire country is outside the 5 foot zone. In the area between 5 and 30' from the home, be aware that chips can transmit fire from one area to another, so do not use them in a widespread or continuous manner. Separate areas mulched with these materials with noncombustible and ignition-resistant materials such as concrete, gravel, rock, and lawn. Smoldering chips can also ignite the plants above them, so if you have larger trees or dense plantings within 30 feet of the home, use non-flammable mulch options in this area too. Once you are past the 30' zone, wood chips are a safe option if they will not ignite fencing or other combustible materials that get close to the home.

Maintenance is very important. A non-flammable mulch covered with needles will not be ember resistant in a wildfire.

Citation: "The Combustibility of Landscape Mulches". Publication SP-11-04, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension. <http://www.unce.unr.edu/publications/files/nr/2011/sp1104.pdf>



Above: an example of wood chip mulch used in a planting island. Because the plants are fairly small, and the island is more than 5' from the house, chips here are less of a risk than if the plants were taller or the mulch covered a larger area.

Below: this large tree is at risk of an ember ignition because of the build-up of dead needles below. Since it is within 5' of the house, there is a high risk of the home catching fire too.



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