



SEDGWICK COUNTY  
ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

# currentnews

## SEDGWICK COUNTY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

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## CONTACT INFORMATION

**HEADQUARTERS**  
P.O. Box 220  
1355 S. 383rd St. West  
Cheney, KS 67025  
316-542-3131  
Fax: 316-542-3943

## FROM THE MANAGER

# Reducing the Risk of Wildfires

## May is National Wildfire Awareness Month

Gone are the days when wildfires were primarily confined to the western United States. Rising temperatures, prolonged drought and shifting weather patterns are creating conditions in places that historically experienced few major fires. Today, more than 30 states, including Kansas, face elevated wildfire risk. The reality is clear: Wildfire risk is no longer regional — it is national.

At Sedgwick County Electric Cooperative, protecting our members and the communities we serve is our highest priority. As we recognize National Wildfire Awareness Month in May, I want you to know that wildfire preparedness is not seasonal work for us. It is a year-round commitment embedded in how we operate.

One of the most important ways

we work to reduce wildfire threats is through our vegetation management program.

Overgrown trees and power lines are a dangerous combination, particularly during dry and windy conditions. Throughout the year, Sedgwick County Electric Cooperative crews along with Davis Tree Service trim and remove vegetation that could come into contact with power lines and other critical infrastructure. This work requires careful planning, coordination with property owners and ongoing inspection. While it may not always



Scott Ayres

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REMEMBER AND HONOR  
**MEMORIAL DAY**

Our office will be closed, Monday, May 25,  
in observance of Memorial Day.

# How to Protect Your Home From a Wildfire

Wildfires move fast, but research shows that most homes don't ignite from an unstoppable wall of flames. They ignite from embers — tiny burning pieces of wood or vegetation that can travel over a mile in the wind and land on or near your home. The good news? There are steps you can take to help your home withstand nearby flames.

The most important area to focus on is your Home Ignition Zone — your house and its 200-foot perimeter. Think of it in three layers: closest, middle and outer. Let's walk through what to do in each.

## 1. THE IMMEDIATE ZONE (0-5 FEET FROM YOUR HOME)

This is the most important zone. Start here. Your goal: create a clean, non-combustible buffer.

- ▶ Clear leaves, pine needles and debris from roofs and gutters.
- ▶ Repair missing or loose shingles and roof tiles.
- ▶ Screen vents with 1/8-inch metal mesh to block embers.
- ▶ Repair damaged window screens and replace broken windows.
- ▶ Remove mulch, firewood, plants, leaves and anything that can burn from around the house.
- ▶ Don't store anything under decks or porches; screen openings to prevent debris buildup.
- ▶ Keep the 5 feet closest to buildings, structures and decks clear of flammable materials. Swap mulch for gravel or crushed stone.

## 2. THE INTERMEDIATE ZONE (5-30 FEET)

This is your landscaping safety zone. The goal is to slow and reduce fire.

- ▶ Keep grass trimmed to 4 inches or shorter.
- ▶ Trim limbs off tree trunks to at least 10 feet above the ground.
- ▶ Space tree canopies at least 18 feet apart (more if on a slope).
- ▶ Make sure mature trees are 10-20 feet away from the home.
- ▶ Remove shrubs and low branches below trees to prevent fire from climbing.
- ▶ Clear plants and grass around propane tanks.
- ▶ Create fuel breaks with walkways, gravel paths, patios or driveways.

## 3. THE EXTENDED ZONE (30-200 FEET)

The goal here is to interrupt the fire's path and keep flames small and on the ground.

- ▶ Remove piles of leaves, fallen branches and dead plants.

- ▶ Remove small conifer trees growing between larger mature trees.
- ▶ Clear vegetation around sheds and outbuildings.
- ▶ Leave at least 12 feet between canopy tops for trees 30 to 60 feet from the home.\*
- ▶ Leave at least 6 feet between canopy tops for trees 60 to 100 feet from the home.\*

## ACCESS AND EMERGENCY PREP

When every minute counts, make it easy to get help.

- ▶ Clearly mark your home address with numbers visible from the road.
- ▶ Know two ways out of your neighborhood.
- ▶ Have a predetermined meeting place.
- ▶ Make a wildfire evacuation plan; include your pets and livestock.
- ▶ Leave early if you feel unsafe — don't wait to be told.

You don't need to fireproof your entire property to make a difference. The small details closest to your home could determine whether it withstands a wildfire. One weekend of cleanup and some thoughtful upgrades can dramatically shift the odds in your favor and bring peace of mind for seasons to come.

## HOME HARDENING CHECKLIST

Small upgrades can make a big difference when embers fly.

### ROOF AND VENTS:

- ▶ Choose a Class A fire-rated roof (e.g., metal, composite shingles, tile or concrete).
- ▶ Cover attic and roof vents with 1/8-inch metal mesh.

### SIDING AND WINDOWS:

- ▶ Use fire-resistant materials like brick, fiber-cement, stucco or treated wood.
- ▶ Install dual-pane tempered glass windows to resist cracking from heat.

\*DISTANCES SUGGESTED ARE BASED ON NATIONAL FIRE PROTECTION ASSOCIATION (NFPA) GUIDELINES. HOWEVER, THE SPACING REQUIRED COULD BE SIGNIFICANTLY GREATER DUE TO SLOPE, TREE SPECIES AND OTHER SITE-SPECIFIC CONDITIONS.

SOURCES: NATIONAL FIRE PROTECTION ASSOCIATION (NFPA), WWW.SMOKEYBEAR.COM

## SAFETY TIP

When planning a controlled burn, stay far away from power poles and overhead lines. Even a well managed fire can damage a pole, sometimes from the inside out, creating serious electrical hazards. Keep suppression tools such as a shovel, water source or fire extinguisher nearby. Never burn during high winds or when wildfire warnings are in effect.

SOURCE: WWW.SAFELECTRICITY.ORG



# Reducing the Risk of Wildfires

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be visible, it is an effective tool for preventing fire ignition and maintaining reliable electricity.

Wildfire mitigation also requires thoughtful public policy. Managing electric infrastructure in and around public lands can present unique challenges. That is why we support practical, commonsense solutions such as the Fix Our Forests Act, which would streamline the ability of electric cooperatives and other utilities to maintain power lines on federal lands and reduce hazardous “fuel” buildup. Policies that promote responsible land management are an essential part of a comprehensive wildfire prevention strategy.

Through membership in Kansas Electric Cooperatives, Inc., Kansas electric co-ops had a seat at the table of the Governor’s Wildfire Task Force. The task force was created in summer of 2022 to study, better prevent, respond to and recover from wildfires. The task force has provided an opportunity for state agencies, first responders, community leaders and utilities across the state to expand collaboration in mitigating wildfire threats.

With federal funds made available through the U.S. Department of Energy State Energy Program, KEC, as a sub-grantee of those funds, has coordinated its member co-ops’ efforts to harden

their fire mitigation planning, mitigate potential future threats to the grid, and leverage resources across multiple electric co-ops.

While we are committed to doing our part, wildfire prevention is a shared responsibility. There are important steps each of us can take to protect our homes and neighborhoods.

Properly extinguish fires by dousing them with water, stirring the ashes and ensuring they are cool to the touch before leaving the area. Avoid outdoor burning on windy or excessively dry days. Maintain a defensible space around your home by clearing dry leaves, dead branches and other flammable debris. Use lawn equipment carefully, particularly during hot conditions, and always check local regulations for burn bans or restrictions.

Of course, as much as we work to prevent wildfires, nobody can outsmart Mother Nature, and we cannot guarantee 100% prevention. Wildfires are becoming more complex and more widespread, but through proactive system management, sound policy and community partnership, we can reduce risks and strengthen resilience.

At Sedgwick County Electric Cooperative, we take this responsibility seriously. Our members depend on us not only for reliable power, but for leadership in safeguarding the communities we call home.

## WILDFIRE ALERTS AND WARNINGS AND WHAT THEY MEAN

Understanding alerts can help you know when to prepare and when conditions may become dangerous.

### FIRE WEATHER ALERTS

#### RED FLAG WARNING:

Critical fire weather conditions are happening or about to happen.

#### FIRE WEATHER WATCH:

Conditions are dry, favorable for critical fire weather and could become dangerous.

### NATIONAL WILDFIRE RISK LEVELS



**LOW (GREEN):** Fire starts are unlikely.

**MODERATE (BLUE):** Some wildfires may occur.

**HIGH (YELLOW):** Wildfires are likely.

**VERY HIGH (ORANGE):** Fires start easily and spread quickly, and are difficult to control.

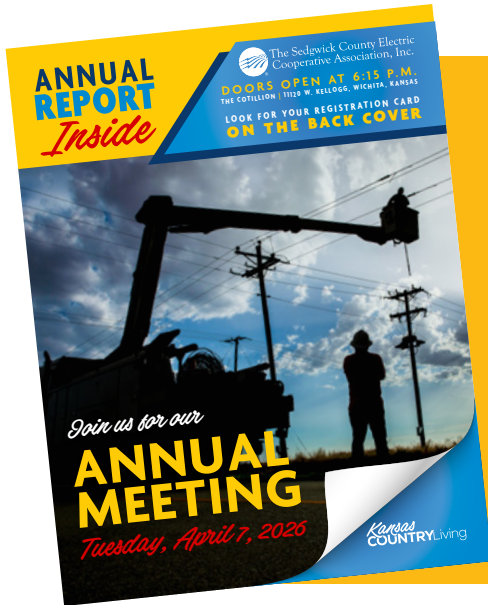
**EXTREME (RED):** Fires start and spread rapidly. No outdoor burning should take place.

SOURCE: WWW.SAFEELECTRICITY.ORG

## WILDFIRE GO BAG Checklist

- ❑ Cellphone & Charger
- ❑ Clothing & Toiletries
- ❑ Face Masks
- ❑ First Aid
- ❑ Flashlight & Batteries
- ❑ Food & Water
- ❑ Important Documents & Photos
- ❑ Medications
- ❑ Pet Essentials





## Read Our Annual Meeting Highlights

Find highlights of the annual meeting in the June issue of *Kansas Country Living*. We'll include:

- ▶ Director election results
- ▶ Manager's report recap
- ▶ Financial standings
- ▶ Co-op Updates
- ▶ Scholarship winners
- ▶ Youth program recipients
- ▶ Employee and director service awards

### PREVENT SUMMER INTERRUPTIONS

## The Advantages of Replacing an Outdated HVAC System Now

With summer heat just around the corner, spring can be a perfect time to prepare for rising temperatures. An outdated heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system, for example, may not be up for the task of keeping a home cool as temperatures gradually rise throughout the summer.

Homeowners can pay more in the long term as a gradual decline in efficiency and more frequent repairs quickly add up. In addition to savings over time, there are multiple reasons to replace an aging system this spring.

In a recent survey, Carrier found more than one-quarter (26%) of homeowners don't know the age of their HVAC system, and a slight majority (54%) don't know the average lifespan of one. Those knowledge gaps can result in missed opportunities for long-term savings.

### AGING SYSTEMS CAN'T TAKE THE HEAT

Many homeowners postpone purchasing a new HVAC system until their existing system fails or they find their aging system is struggling to maintain a consistent temperature. Often, upfront costs deter homeowners from purchasing a new system; however, 8 in 10 homeowners would consider a new heating and cooling system if it paid for itself in energy savings within 5-10 years. With a new energy-efficient system, those savings are possible.

### A NEW HVAC SYSTEM IS A CRITICAL HOME INVESTMENT

Modern heating and cooling systems have uses beyond heating and cooling. They can improve indoor air quality by balancing humidity levels, reducing drafts, and maintaining a consistent climate across multiple rooms and stories. They

also use less energy and run more quietly than older systems, making a home quieter and more cost-effective.

### HVAC BASICS MANY HOMEOWNERS MISS

HVAC units often go unseen, yet a home's comfort depends on them running consistently. It's critical that homeowners schedule annual maintenance appointments to ensure their system is running as it should and they're aware of when it may be time to replace.

While it may seem more cost-effective to stick with an outdated system for one more season, an old system could prolong issues and ultimately cost homeowners more in repairs.

Spring is an ideal time to invest in a new HVAC system, as contractors are generally more available to install it and homeowners can get ahead of the summer heat, ensuring they'll stay cool all season long.

### SIGNS IT'S TIME TO REPLACE

Red flags that indicate it may be time to replace your HVAC system include:

- ▶ It's more than 10-15 years old.
- ▶ Repairs are becoming more frequent or more expensive.
- ▶ Energy bills are rising even though your usage hasn't changed.
- ▶ Hot and cold spots are becoming more common, or temperatures vary from room to room.
- ▶ It struggles to reach or maintain your set temperature.
- ▶ It runs constantly, cycles on and off more than usual, or no longer cools as efficiently as it once did.

Many companies offer specials during the spring and fall months. A new HVAC system means more than just cool temps this summer; it means added home value, cleaner air and peace of mind.