

Hello. I'm Alicia Mason, and I'm the host of a brand-new series called "Seven Saturdays to a Fire-Resistant Home." Each week, we'll talk about ways to make your home safer and more resilient in wildfire season. We're gonna show you three simple and easy things you can do today that can help protect the immediate area around your home. First, we're gonna teach you how to spot and remove the little things that increase the risk of your home catching fire from embers. Next, we'll clear those stubborn gaps in your patio or deck and demonstrate how to properly maintain other vulnerable spaces, like your roof. And finally, we'll show you how to remove combustible items to better prepare your property for a wildfire. If you've ever had a question about where and how to store items such as patio furniture and propane tanks, you're gonna want to stick around. But I need some help. I want to introduce you to the former chief of the CAL FIRE Butte Unit and now senior public safety specialist at PG&E, David Hawks.

Thanks for having me, Alicia. All over California, our summers are getting hotter and drier and our fire seasons longer. I've seen it firsthand myself, working 31 years as a firefighter. It seems like every fire season is worse than the last one. And with this year's severe drought, we all need to do a little bit more to get ready. Firefighters work to protect homes from wildfires and it always makes their job safer when residents have prepared their homes beforehand.

And that's why we're starting the series in the first place, right David?

Exactly, Alicia.

Well, I'm ready. Let's get started.

Well, Alicia, the first place we're gonna start is with defensible space. It's arguably the most important thing to protecting your home.

Okay, gotcha. So for an homeowner, what is that first important thing?

Well, the first thing to look for is the first five feet, the home itself, and the first five feet. What we're trying to do there is we're trying to remove the little things.

What are the little things? 'Cause they they're definitely important, correct?

Absolutely. Well, we call them the little things but maybe we should call them the big things 'cause those are the things that can actually result in your home burning down if we don't clear them. They're things like pine needles, dry grass, dead leaves, small twigs, and things that accumulate around the home, or things that property owners keep around their home that could catch fire. Let's take a look around for some little things. I'll show you where they're at.

Okay, perfect. Can you briefly explain why cleaning up these pine needles are so important and how you've seen that firsthand?

This is absolutely one of the most important things in the first five feet: pine needles, dry leaves, small twigs, things of that nature that accumulate. And quite often they'll accumulate in corners and alcoves in the home. And that's where embers- they travel great distances, often miles in front of the main fire front. And they'll land just like a blizzard against your house. Where the wind blows, the embers will flow is kind of one of the things that we say. And those embers will blow into here and they'll catch this flame material on fire, catching eventually the siding on fire, potentially, and extending up the house. But it's really easy to clean it up.

Well, let's start cleaning.

All right, let's grab some gloves and clean these up.

All right, well, this is easy.

Yes, now that we've cleaned up the patio, it's important to remember that there's other locations, like decks, that are vulnerable. So, it's important that you look under your deck for dead pine needles and leaves. You rake that material out. To clean between the planks on the deck in the groove, you can use a sharp tool to rake that out of there or you can use a pressure washer to clean it as well.

So, during a wildfire season, obviously firefighters have so much going on. So, this work that homeowners do obviously helps firefighters in a lot of ways. Can you touch on that?

Absolutely. When fires break out across California, fire departments get stretched; there's not enough resources to defend every home. So, everything that homeowners do makes it safer and more efficient for firefighters to do their job- protect one home and move to the next home.

Definitely and we want to help them do that to stay safe. Okay, well, thank you.

You're welcome.

So great- we've cleaned the patio. So, what are some other vulnerable places homeowners should maintain?

Your roof and gutters are some of the most vulnerable places in your home and you can see in this particular- pine needles have accumulated in the gutters and on the roof here. And while not everybody would feel comfortable getting up on a ladder, they should hire a professional if that's the case. But here I feel comfortable and I'm gonna get on the ladder and clean these gutters.

So, what are the best tools to use for this type of work?

Good question. They sell a cleaner that you can get down in gutters and clean it out but I've made this tool here. It's nothing more than a broom handle with a 90-degree bracket and hard piece of plastic. It allows me to reach out about five feet on either side of the ladder at a time.

Okay, well, very inventive and also seems very cost effective.

Yes, nothing more than a broom handle, little L-bracket, probably 10, 12 dollars.

Perfect. All right, let's get cleaning. So, my family and I love to barbecue and as I see here, the barbecue's up against the house. Is that an issue?

No, not for small barbecues. Not really, although there's better places to store them. But this particular propane tank is small- five-gallon tank. With this five-gallon propane tank, what's important is to make sure that the fitting is snug- not over-tight but good and snug. Smell around it to make sure you don't smell any gas, make sure that it's off when not in use, and then make sure that it's sitting on a firm slab foundation or in the propane holder in the barbecue.

So, what about bigger propane tanks?

Well, larger propane tanks are required under code to be placed away from the home when the home was built. The smaller propane tanks are not as serious a problem and can be kept closer to the home. But because we have room here at our house we're gonna move it out to more open area where it's away from the house and it's away from other forest fuels that can put heat on this propane tank.

Okay, well, that sounds good. Let's move it.

Okay!

Okay, so is there anything else that we should look into?

Yes, we really need to look around the home to see if there's any firewood stored. Firewood should not be stored up against a home.

Okay, well, let's go do that.

Okay.

So, we have some firewood here up against the house and I'm guessing that's not where it should be.

No, it shouldn't be. We need to keep firewood at least 30 feet away from the home. We also should be looking for other combustible materials- old cardboard boxes, anything that could catch fire. Picture yourself walking around your home with a book of matches. You strike that match and you drop that on that particular item. Would it catch fire? Because if the answer is yes, it needs to be removed. But let's start by removing this firewood.

Sounds good. Okay, David, we are all done. That was so easy. Only took an afternoon. I think it'll be so approachable for people at home.

Absolutely. We accomplished a lot and we sure made our home a lot more fire safe.

I feel really good about it. Thanks so much, David, for the help today. You know, I think it's important for everyone to remember that you aren't just protecting yourself. You're also protecting your community when you create defensible space

That's right. As a public safety specialist at PG&E, we're working on what we can do as utility to be safer. And it's really important that we do our part. With fire seasons becoming so severe, we can all make our families and communities safer by keeping our homes as fire-resistant as possible.

What are we going to talk about next week?

Next week, we're going to learn how to create defensible space around our homes up to 100 feet away or to the property line.

And we'll see you all again next Saturday for "Seven Saturdays to a Fire-Resistant Home."