

[Urban wildfires may become more likely. A Modern West live panel discusses how to prepare.](#)

Wyoming Public Media

Urban wildfires in unlikely places are likely to become more prevalent as the climate warms, so homeowners across the American West should consider their immediate risk. That's according to a panel of wildfire survivors and experts assembled for a Facebook Live event with Wyoming Public Media's Modern Westpodcast. The panel included Ariel Lavery, producer of the Burn Scar, the current season of the podcast, and her mom, Vicky Simpson. The Burn Scar tells the story of how their beloved home in the Enclave neighborhood outside Boulder burned down and their decision to rebuild a multigenerational energy-efficient green home.

Steve Colleton is the former mayor of Paradise, California and lost his home in the Camp Fire in 2018. His tip? Keep your gas tank full.

"If you're at half full, consider yourself empty," Colleton said. "Because my wife, that was part of her dilemma, she had less than a quarter tank of gas. And when you're trapped in traffic for four or five hours, if you run out of gas, now not only are you in trouble, but the people behind you can't evacuate."

Colleton said that, even though Paradise did lots of evacuation practices, it didn't prepare residents for what hit them.

"We have drills where we invite the community, we set up roadblocks and we actually practice evacuation. We have different zones and none of that works in that kind of catastrophe," he said. "Not at all, because what happened to [Marshall Fire in Colorado victims], what happened in Maui, you can't practice for that. It's just immediate and all inclusive."

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Lisa Hughes lost her home in the 2021 Marshall Fire in Colorado and is an insurance advocate for United Policyholders.

“Knowing what I know now, I would definitely make sure I was adequately insured,” Hughes said. “Which I know was an issue in Paradise, and it has also been an issue in Marshall, and Maui, and every other place we worked. And also, just make sure that you’re signed up for emergency notifications.”

Hughes said that those notifications should be changed so people opt out of them, not opt in, making them a standard feature on cell phones.

Larry Boven, a fire expert on the panel, said communities need to focus on more than just individual homes.

“I know we can focus a lot on hardening our own homes, but I think the the real key is going to be hardening those spaces that are outside of our community, the open spaces, the parks, that we enjoy, and trying to come up with ways to manage those spaces in a better way.”

Such fires are possible in Wyoming as well. Both the Marshall Fire and Camp Fire were worsened by high winds. And recently a grassfire in the Laramie Valley known as the Mason Fire burned 100 acres in mid November, well outside the state’s usual fire season, similar to the Marshall Fire that ignited in late December and was also exacerbated by high winds. To hear the full conversation, download The Modern West podcastbonus episode, scheduled for release February 7.

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