

## SO YOU'RE BUILDING A HOME . . .

Forest fires, grass fires, and structure fires are not uncommon in Madison County, Montana. Local firefighters will respond to a 911 fire call as quickly as possible. However, factors such as good directions, distance, weather, road conditions, and availability of fire department equipment and volunteers all affect whether or not that fire truck will appear within 5 minutes of a call, or 50 minutes.

We offer these Fire Prevention/Fire Protection tips to help you design and build a safe home environment.

- **Water.** Where is the nearest water supply for firefighting, and is it readily accessible? You may want to consider installing an underground cistern or other type of water supply on your property. If you have neighbors nearby, talk with them about sharing the cost of placing a water supply in a central location. Attach a dry hydrant or provide a draft opening to the cistern.
- **Access.** Can you get to and from your home at all times of the year? Steep grade, a sharp switchback, a narrow driveway, poor road surface material, snow accumulation, a weak bridge crossing, and lack of a turnaround area close to the house can all create problems for emergency service vehicles. In extreme cases of difficult terrain and/or access, a fire truck may not be able to reach the fire. Without an emergency escape route on your property, you and your family may not be able to reach safety.
- **Vegetation.** How thick is the vegetation around your home and along your driveway or above-ground utility lines? Trees, brush, and dense undergrowth are fire hazards. Vegetation around structures must be managed so as to provide a "defensible space" for you and the firefighters. Removal of dead and fallen trees, tree limbs, shrubs, and other flammable vegetation close to the house is recommended. Certain types of vegetation are well-adapted to our dry climate and stay green and succulent all year around. Planting these species can improve fire resistance.
- **Building Location.** Do you plan to site your home in the mouth of a canyon? In a ridge saddle? On a densely forested, steep slope? Such locations present extreme fire hazards and are ill-advised.
- **Building Materials.** Is your roofing material fire-resistant? Does your chimney have a spark arrestor? Do you plan to install a residential sprinkler system? Such items are strongly advised, especially in high fire hazard areas.
- **House Address.** Have you obtained an address from the Madison County Planning Office? Have you posted an address sign that is visible from the main access road?
- **Consult the experts.** Your local fire department is eager to offer more specific suggestions on how to safeguard your home and reduce fire danger on your property. The county extension agent, local conservation district supervisors, and Natural Resources Conservation Service staff can recommend fire-resistant vegetation for your landscaping plans.

May your new home in Madison County be designed, built, and maintained in a fire-safe manner.

- Board of Madison County Commissioners
- Local Fire Departments in or nearest to Madison County:
  - Alder
  - Gallatin Canyon
  - Harrison
  - Madison Valley
  - Melrose
  - Sheridan
  - Twin Bridges
  - Virginia City
  - Whitehall
- Madison County Fire Warden
- Madison County Disaster and Emergency Services
- Madison County Planning Board