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Wildfires: Risks and Mitigation Measures

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Summary

Repeated heatwaves during summer 2025 exponentially increased the number of wildfires throughout Europe and North America. OSAC members with operations in or travelers to countries prone to wildfires should be aware of wildfire risks and seek ways to protect operations and travelers in the event of this type of natural disaster. This report examines global wildfire risks and provides recommendations for natural disaster emergency planning.

Wildfires: The Basics

Wildfires are caused by natural phenomena such as heatwaves, increased temperatures, and lightning, or by human activity. When temperatures rise, especially in the summer months, the risks of wildfires becoming more frequent, intense, and long-lasting. Hotter and drier conditions, combined with more frequent droughts and heatwaves, create highly flammable conditions. Weather conditions, topography, and vegetation types in a given area can all impact the likelihood of a wildfire spreading uncontrollably. Additionally, human-caused fires—either intentionally or unintentionally—are often started near the border between built-up areas and semi-natural or wild areas, which increases the risk to private sector operations.

Wildfires can destroy or severely damage houses, buildings, and critical infrastructure such as power lines, water supplies, and transport routes. Populations adjacent to burn areas may face evacuation orders, property loss, and exposure to harmful smoke. Smoke from wildfires can spread outside the burn area and warrant “smoke days,” where populations are urged to stay indoors. Wildfires can also increase the risk of follow-on disasters due to dramatically changed landscapes and ground conditions. Flood risks remain significantly higher until some root vegetation returns, which can often take up to five years or more.

The Canadian Forestry Service has developed the Fire Weather Index ([FWI](#))¹, a meteorologically based index used worldwide to estimate the danger of fires. It estimates forest fire ignition and potential spread conditions based on weather variables such as temperature, rain, humidity, and wind speed. The index provides a way for governments to communicate the risk of fires to the public and make informed decisions in wildfire management.

Mitigation Measures

OSAC members should consider the following recommendations when preparing staff for potential wildfires in their areas:

Have a plan in place if a wildfire threatens homes or businesses. This should include communication protocols, evacuation and continuity of business plans, and alternate routes if primary evacuation plans are affected.

Phone systems are often busy or offline following a disaster. Establish a communication structure that includes text messages or social media to an open line of communication between employees and travelers.

Monitor weather conditions, local news, and the FWI, and appropriately alert employees and travelers if conditions are favorable for a wildfire.

Travelers should avoid areas affected by wildfires, especially those under evacuation orders, and follow police instructions regarding road closures or traffic disruptions.

Smoke inhalation poses a serious health risk, even if you are not near the flames. Monitor the air quality index before going outside if wildfires are in the vicinity. Consider supplying staff and travelers with N95 masks to protect against inhaling harmful particles.

If a wildfire is near your location, including your residence, evacuate immediately to an unaffected area. Do not attempt to drive through areas affected by wildfires or heavy smoke. If you have no other choice but to drive through smoke from a wildfire, drive slowly with the windows up, outside air vents closed, and headlights on for increased visibility.

Wear cotton rather than artificial fabrics. Avoid hot ash, charred trees, smoldering debris, and live embers. The ground may contain heat pockets that can burn you or spark another fire.

If travelers or employees have pre-existing medical conditions that can be exacerbated by poor air quality, advise that they have all necessary medications and exercise increased caution before stepping outside.

Additional Information

For more information on the security environment in specific countries, please reach out to the OSAC regional distros below:

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Attachments

 [OSAC - Wildfires - Risks and Mitigation Measures.pdf](#) 

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