

Denver Fence Guys Details Material Options for Wildfire Exposure

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Denver Fence Guys has published guidance on fence material selection and placement for properties in the wildland-urban interface, released during the peak of Colorado's fire season. The guidance addresses a component of home wildfire preparation that receives less attention than roofing, siding and landscaping, despite fencing often being the structure closest to a home's exterior wall.

Post-fire research has changed how fencing is viewed in wildfire planning. Investigations by the National Institute of Standards and Technology following the Marshall Fire examined how flames moved between structures in a suburban setting, and research by the Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety has documented combustible fencing as a pathway that can carry fire toward a building. Wooden fencing attached directly to a structure has drawn particular attention in that work.

The concern is less about the fence itself than about what it connects. A fence running from open vegetation to an exterior wall creates a continuous line of fuel across the property boundary. Embers landing along that line can ignite the fence some distance from the house and travel inward, arriving at the structure without any direct flame contact from the original fire front.

Home ignition zone guidance from the Colorado State Forest Service addresses this by treating the area immediately around a structure differently from the rest of a property. The zone nearest the building is where noncombustible materials and the removal of fuels carry the greatest weight, and fencing frequently occupies that space.

Material behavior varies considerably. Metal fencing, including ornamental iron and chain link, does not ignite or sustain a flame, though attached wood components, gate hardware and adjacent vegetation still factor into overall exposure. Wood offers privacy that metal cannot match but carries the highest ignition risk, and a species selected for rot and insect resistance does not translate into fire resistance without treatment.

Composite and vinyl products sit between those positions and are harder to generalize about. Composite formulations differ by manufacturer, and flame spread performance is measured under standardized test methods such as ASTM E84, which means product-level test data is more useful than category-level assumptions. Vinyl tends to deform and lose integrity under heat rather than sustaining flame, and that behavior can open gaps in a barrier rather than propagate fire along it.

"The material question matters, but where the fence meets the house usually matters more," said Barrett Pribyl, Owner of Denver Fence Guys. "A wood fence running across a yard behaves differently than the same fence bolted to an exterior wall."

Standoff distance is the practical version of that point. Substituting a noncombustible section where a fence meets a structure, or introducing a gap between the fence and the wall, addresses the connection without requiring an entire fence line to be replaced. That approach allows property owners to keep wood across most of a property while removing the segment that presents the most direct pathway to the building.

Maintenance carries weight as well. Vegetation growing against a fence line, leaf and needle accumulation at the base of panels, and stored materials along a fence all add fuel in a location where guidance calls for less of it. Those conditions develop gradually and are easy to overlook on a fence that was clear when it was installed. Wood stacked against a fence for storage, a common arrangement on properties with limited space, places concentrated fuel directly against a structure that may already run toward the house.

"Most of what accumulates along a fence line arrives slowly enough that nobody registers it," Pribyl said. "A walk of the property with fuel in mind tends to surface things that have been there for years."

Gates and hardware are a further consideration for properties where access matters during an emergency. A gate wide enough to admit equipment, and hardware that operates without power, affect how a property can be reached and left. Automated gate systems that default to a fixed position during a power interruption present a different set of considerations than manual hardware.

The company notes that these considerations apply most directly to properties along the western edge of the metropolitan area, where developed lots transition to open space over short distances. Terrain contributes as well, since fire moves differently on slopes than on flat ground, and properties on the foothill margin often combine both slope and adjacent open space. Property owners in those areas weighing a new fence or a replacement have an opportunity to factor exposure into the material decision at the point when changing it costs nothing.

The guidance forms part of a broader effort by the company to address regional conditions affecting fence

performance, including soil movement, wind exposure and ultraviolet intensity at elevation. Each of those conditions shapes material selection independently, and properties in the interface frequently contend with more than one at a time.

Denver Fence Guys is a fence contractor founded in 2007, serving residential and commercial properties across the Denver metropolitan area with fence installation, repair and maintenance. The company works with wood, vinyl, composite, ornamental iron, chain link and precast concrete fencing for residential, commercial and homeowner association properties, and provides gate installation and access control systems. Denver Fence Guys is a member of the American Fence Association and backs its installation work with a 10-year workmanship warranty. Each project is assigned a dedicated project manager who oversees planning, scheduling, installation and a final walkthrough.

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