

Fire and Water

[Bob Feeman](#)

In Southern California, nearly 2,000 homes were destroyed in late October 2007 as wildfires fanned by Santa Ana winds swept down through valleys and ravines into neighborhoods east of San Diego. Many of the homes and neighborhoods that were destroyed were located in what fire-prevention experts call the “wildland-urban interface,” a region where man-made structures meet natural landscapes like grasslands, shrublands and forests. Homes in these areas are particularly susceptible to damage by fire.

Whether homeowners should be building in these areas at all is a debate for another day. The fact is that it’s happening, not only in Southern California but all over the country. And many homeowners whose homes were destroyed, undeterred by the fierceness of nature, are already making plans to rebuild. But before they start picking out countertops and flooring, they would be wise to think carefully – not necessarily about where they build, but how they build.

Experts point to a number of components that can make homes, no matter where they’re located, more resistant to fire. Often, in wildfire regions, many homes are destroyed not by walls of fire coming across the landscape but by the thousands of embers thrown into the air. When these embers fall on wooden roofs or decks, or enter a home through an unscreened vent, they can ignite a fire that eventually destroys the home.

To prevent this from happening, homeowners can install lightweight concrete, tile or slate roofs, fiber-cement siding, heat-resistant windows, and decks made of composite materials. They can screen all vents and the tops of chimneys to prevent the intrusion of embers. And they can clear shrubbery and vegetation to a distance of at least 100 feet from the home to keep wildfires at bay. For more information on creating a fire-resistant home, visit the Firewise Communities website at [www.firewise.org](http://www.firewise.org).

Homeowners in Georgia, Alabama and other areas of the South are facing a different type of disaster, but it is no less threatening. The lack of rainfall in the area has created a water emergency that many are calling the worst in history. Again, homeowners can’t call down rain from the sky, but they can take measures to conserve the water that is currently available. Installing fixtures such as low-flow faucets and toilets can reduce water usage by hundreds of gallons a month. And opting for water-conserving clothes washers and dishwashers can save gallons of water, as well as energy costs. For more ideas, homeowners can visit [www.conservewatergeorgia.net](http://www.conservewatergeorgia.net) or call 888-373-5947.

These strategies can be adopted not only by those who live in the South and West, but by homeowners everywhere. Many options are readily available to all of us and can be easily adopted in our homes. The days when we, as a

community of homeowners, can ignore smart building practices are over. It's time to make smart choices that can make a difference.

This article is compliments of Smart HomeOwner Magazine, the Presenting Sponsor of our 2008 *Smart Home Owner Seminar Series* taking place throughout the weekend. Bob Feeman is the editor of Smart HomeOwner Magazine. He can be reached at [bfeeman@smarthomeownermag.com](mailto:bfeeman@smarthomeownermag.com)