### **WILDFIRE WATCH**



Wildfire serves an important role in keeping many ecosystems healthy. However, human impacts on the environment can change how wildfire affects different regions and lead to unwanted accidental fires. Practice using different weather factors to predict fire danger levels in your area and learn more about preventing accidental fires.

Note: This activity does NOT involve the use of fire.

### **MATERIALS**

- · Science notebook or paper
- · Something to write with
- · Local weather information—this can be gathered from the newspaper, a cellphone app, weather.gov, or using tools such as a thermometer
- · Access to an area outside to observe and collect leaves, sticks, and other fuels

#### **PROCEDURE**

- · Copy the table on the next page into your science notebook.
- · In your table, record the following meteorology data points for your location: temperature, humidity, and wind speed...
- · You can use tools like a thermometer or use websites (like https://www.weather.gov), a phone app, or a newspaper for reference.
- · Next, go to an outside area where you can collect some fallen plant life. Examples might include grass, leaves, sticks, or pieces of bark.
- · Plants can serve as fuels for wildfires, and scientists look at the moisture content in these fuels to help them predict fire danger.
- · Analyze your plant fuels—draw or write a description in the table in your science notebook. Note whether they seem wet, moist, or dry. How fast do you think these fuels might burn, and for how long? Do they seem like they would dry out quickly or slowly?
- · Read the descriptions below for each of the five fire danger levels (low through extreme). Using your weather and fuel data, make a prediction for the current fire danger level in your area.
- · Check your prediction against the rating for your area found on https://www.weather.gov/fire.

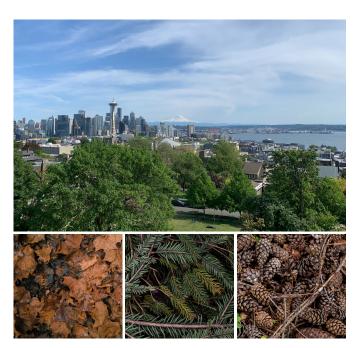








Show us how you're being curious! Share your results with us.







### **WILDFIRE WATCH**



### FIRE DANGER PREDICTION WORKSHEET

Location:	Date:	т	ime:
Temperature: Humidi	ty:	Windspeed: _	
Use this area to draw or write your plant fuels collected from outside. Label whether they were wet, moist, or dry.			
Fire danger prediction:			
Fire danger rating from website:			









Experiment continued on next page...



### **WILDFIRE WATCH**



#### WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Weather conditions play a big part in the level of fire danger in an area. High temperatures, low humidity, and strong winds can all increase the likelihood of a fire to start and spread. Scientists use weather data as well as information about fuels and local geography to predict fire danger.

Fire scientists use five different color-coded levels to help the public understand fire potential and prevent human-caused wildfires. You may have seen signs at state or national parks displaying that area's current color-coded fire danger level.



Fires can start from most accidental causes, but the number of fires that start is usually low. If a fire starts in dry grassland, it can burn and spread quickly on windy days. Fires are still not likely MODERATE to become serious and are often easy to control.

At this level, fuels do not ignite easily from small embers, but a more intense heat source, such as lightning, may start fires. Most wood fires will spread slowly and controlling fires is generally easy.

Fires can start easily from most causes and small fuels (such as grasses and needles) will ignite readily. Unattended campfires and brush fires are likely to escape. Fires will spread easily and can be difficult to control unless they are put out while they are still small.

HIGH

Fires will start easily from most causes, will spread rapidly, and have a quick increase in intensity. Small fires can quickly become large fires and exhibit extreme intensity. These fires can be difficult to control and produce large and long-lasting fires.

> At the "extreme" level, fires of all types start quickly and burn intensely. All fires are potentially serious and small fires can become large fires extremely quickly. These fires are very difficult to fight and often last for several days or

Chart adapted from fs.usda.gov











### **WILDFIRE WATCH**



#### 3-5 GRADE EXPLORATION

- · Humidity is the level of moisture in the air. How do you think higher or lower humidity will affect fire danger level? What about wind speed?
- · What geographic characteristics do you think might put a habitat at greater risk for accidental wildfires?
- · What are some steps humans can take to prevent accidental wildfires?
- · What things can you do to be fire safe? Think about both indoor spaces and outside in nature.
- · What would happen to the amount of fuel in a forest if humans tried to stop all the natural forest fires? How might that affect the size of future fires?













