

YOGAVILLE COMMUNITY FIRE SAFETY & EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS PLAN

A Working Memo for the Community Meeting

Sunday, May 17, 2026 • 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

76 The Way — The Yoga Shala Community Room

Hosted by Galen & Erik

Buckingham County, Virginia

Prepared in the context of:

- A state-wide drought advisory affecting all of Virginia
- Buckingham County under EXTREME drought (U.S. Drought Monitor, May 2026)
 - 350+ Virginia wildfires already this year, 4,200+ acres burned
- Rainfall deficit of ~5.5 inches in 2026, on top of ~9 inches in 2025

Purpose & How to Use This Memo

This memo is a working document for the May 17 community fire safety meeting and the days, weeks, and months of work that follow it. It is not meant to be read cover-to-cover in one sitting, and it is certainly not a script for the meeting itself. It is a reference.

The meeting will be a 2-hour conversation among neighbors. Most of what matters will happen in that room — questions asked, concerns raised, decisions made. This memo exists to make sure that when somebody asks, “How far is the closest fire station?” or “Who would actually carry the phone tree?” or “What can we volunteer for?” we have real answers, not vague gestures.

How the document is organized

- Part I sets the context — the drought, the regional fire picture, Virginia’s fire history, and Yogaville’s specific risk profile. This is what we are responding to.
- Part II is the proposed meeting agenda, with timing, roles, and facilitation notes for Galen and Erik.
- Part III maps the local emergency response infrastructure — fire stations, distances, response expectations, and the county system.
- Part IV is a phone-tree design and implementation plan, including backup communication channels.
- Part V describes the volunteer roles that the community can stand up out of this meeting.
- Part VI lays out the highest priorities — what we must do, what we should do, what we can do over time.
- Parts VII–IX cover home and property safety, evacuation planning, and wildfire-specific considerations.
- Part X provides ready-to-print handouts: checklists, escape plan templates, sign-up forms, and contact sheets.
- Part XI sketches the follow-up plan after May 17, with concrete owners and deadlines.
- The Appendices include a glossary, a resource list, and source notes.

A note on tone

This work is being done in a community that takes seriously the inner dimensions of fear, attachment, and equanimity. Preparedness, done well, is not a fear practice — it is a freedom practice. The person who has tested their smoke alarm and packed a go-bag is less afraid, not more. That is the spirit we hope to carry into Sunday morning, and into the work that follows.

Om Shanti.

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Executive Summary

Yogaville sits on roughly 750 wooded acres along the James River in northern Buckingham County, Virginia. As of mid-May 2026, this part of central Virginia is in extreme drought — the highest classification short of “exceptional” on the U.S. Drought Monitor. Most of Nelson and Buckingham counties, and the adjacent southwest corner of Fluvanna /County, are colored deep red on the map. The Virginia Department of Forestry has already suppressed more than 350 wildfires this year, burning over 4,200 acres, and the spring fire season is not yet behind us.

This meeting is being called because the conditions on the ground have changed, and our preparedness as a community has not yet caught up. Most ashram residents and Yogaville-area neighbors do not have a current home escape plan, have not tested their smoke alarms in the past year, and have no agreed-upon way to reach each other quickly if a fire breaks out at 3:00 AM.

The five things this memo asks us to do

1. **Adopt a simple, working phone tree** — anchored by no fewer than three “captains” and tested within 30 days. (Part IV.)
2. **Establish a small Fire Safety & Preparedness Committee** — 3 to 5 residents, meeting monthly, with named volunteer roles. (Part V.)
3. **Conduct a community-wide home safety check this season** — smoke alarms, CO detectors, fire extinguishers, escape routes, and defensible space in the 0–5 foot zone around every dwelling. (Parts VII & X.)
4. **Build a relationship with our local fire departments** — Glenmore VFD, Dillwyn VFD, and Buckingham County Emergency Services — and invite their personnel to walk the ashram grounds. (Part III.)
5. **Sign up every household for the Buckingham County emergency alert system** and confirm that ashram leadership has a working point-of-contact for evacuation coordination. (Part III & XI.)

The risk picture, briefly

- Drought: All of Virginia is under drought watch or warning advisory. Buckingham County is in extreme drought (D3). Rainfall deficit $\approx$ 5.5 inches for 2026 to date, on top of $\approx$ 9 inches from 2025.
- Fuels: After two dry years, leaf litter, deadfall, and standing dead vegetation are abundant. Spring fire season runs through May 15; statewide 4 PM burning law was in effect Feb 15 – April 30.
- Ignition sources: 80–90% of Virginia wildfires are human-caused — primarily escaped debris burning. The remainder are equipment, smoking, campfires, electrical, and arson.
- Local history: Major regional fires in recent memory include the Matts Creek Fire (Bedford County, 2023, $\sim$ 11,000 acres) and Quaker Run Fire (Madison County, 2023, $\sim$ 4,000 acres).

Neither destroyed structures, but both demonstrated that 21st-century Virginia is no longer immune to large-acreage wildfires.

- Yogaville-specific exposure: rural location, dispersed structures across forested terrain, single primary access road, residential program participants and elderly residents who may need evacuation assistance, sacred and irreplaceable structures (LOTUS Shrine), and a population that fluctuates from ~200 residents to many hundreds during programs.

What we are not

We are not the fire department. We are not first responders. We are a community that wants to be a good partner to the fire departments that serve us, that wants its residents to live and worship safely on this land, and that wants to be ready — both inwardly and outwardly — for whatever this hot, dry season may bring.

Bottom line for May 17:

Walk out of the meeting with (1) a phone-tree captain volunteer for every neighborhood cluster, (2) a Fire Safety Committee with a named convener, (3) a date for a follow-up walkthrough with a representative from Glenmore VFD or Buckingham Emergency Services, and (4) every attendee signed up for Buckingham County emergency alerts before they leave the room.

Part I — Context and Risk

1. The Context for This Meeting

Several factors converged in the weeks leading up to this meeting and prompted its scheduling:

A regional drought, sharpening into something more

The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality issued a drought advisory on May 14, 2026, that places every county and city in the Commonwealth under at least a drought watch. The Middle James drought-evaluation region — which includes Buckingham, Fluvanna, Albemarle, Amherst, Appomattox, Cumberland, Nelson, and surrounding counties — has been under a drought warning advisory since mid-April.

The U.S. Drought Monitor, updated weekly, currently shows Nelson and Buckingham counties almost entirely under extreme drought conditions (D3) — the second-most-severe classification. The Charlottesville area only recorded 0.97 inches of rain for April, making it the sixth driest April on record at Richmond International Airport. The rainfall deficit for 2026 is roughly 5.5 inches, accumulated on top of a nearly 9-inch deficit from 2025.

Drought of this depth changes the fire-behavior model. Live and dead fuels — leaves, grasses, deadfall, root systems — desiccate. Soil moisture drops. A fire that under normal conditions would smolder begins to run. Ignition energy required falls; rate of spread rises; suppression difficulty climbs.

Local fires and red-flag days

Through April 2026, the Virginia Department of Forestry had responded to more than 350 wildfires in the Commonwealth, burning approximately 4,200 acres. The Frog Hollow Fire in Scott County (320 acres, fully contained) was the largest. The agency has been issuing Class 3 and Class 4 fire-danger ratings on a regular basis through the spring; Class 5 (Extreme) days have been called on multiple occasions.

Closer to home, several small brush fires and debris-burn escapes have occurred in Buckingham, Fluvanna, and Cumberland counties since March, prompting periodic county-level burn bans. Buckingham County instituted an open-air burn ban in April 2026. Several area neighbors have reported small grass and woodland fires on their own properties, most extinguished by the owners or by quick response from the volunteer fire department.

Equipment, response-capacity, and preparedness gaps surfaced informally

Conversations among Yogaville residents and neighbors over the past several weeks have surfaced concrete questions that no one has clear answers to: Where are the fire extinguishers in the major ashram buildings, and when were they last inspected? Are the smoke alarms in the Lotus Conference Hall, the dining hall, and the residential buildings still within their service life? Do we have an evacuation plan for a residential program with 100+ guests? If a fire started in the woods adjacent to the residential community at night, how would word actually get around?

This meeting is the community’s first formal step toward answering those questions together.

The intention of the meeting (from the invitation)

As stated in the May 13 announcement to the Village Sangha Association:

“The intention is to help strengthen awareness, preparedness, and mutual support within our local community during heightened fire-risk conditions.”

Five themes were named: fire prevention and risk awareness; emergency preparedness planning; equipment and resource coordination; communication systems and evacuation considerations; and community training ideas and next steps. This memo addresses each of those themes in turn.

2. Current Drought & Fire-Risk Conditions in Buckingham County

The U.S. Drought Monitor classification

The U.S. Drought Monitor — a joint product of the National Drought Mitigation Center, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and NOAA — classifies drought on a five-level scale from “Abnormally Dry” (D0) to “Exceptional Drought” (D4):

Level	Code	What it means	Where we are
Abnormally Dry	D0	Short-term dryness slowing planting and growth; some lingering deficits	
Moderate Drought	D1	Some damage to crops, pastures; streams, reservoirs low	
Severe Drought	D2	Crop or pasture losses likely; water shortages common; restrictions imposed	Most of central VA
Extreme Drought	D3	Major crop/pasture losses; widespread water shortages or restrictions	Buckingham & Nelson
Exceptional Drought	D4	Emergency conditions; widespread crop/pasture losses; shortages of water in reservoirs	

As of the May 14 release, almost the entirety of Buckingham County is in extreme drought. The southwest corner of Fluvanna County (closest to Yogaville) is also in extreme drought; the rest of Fluvanna, along with Albemarle, Greene, Madison, Orange, and Louisa counties, are in severe drought.

Rainfall deficits

The deficit is what matters more than any single month’s number. Central Virginia ended 2025 with a rainfall shortfall of approximately 9 inches relative to the 1991–2020 historical average. The first four-plus months of 2026 added another ~5.5 inches to that deficit. Reservoirs are dropping. Wells in

surrounding counties are running low; some shallow wells have gone dry. Soil moisture, both at the surface and at root depth, is well below normal.

For a forested property like Yogaville, the implication is straightforward: every fallen leaf, every standing piece of dead timber, every patch of brush is drier than it would be in a normal year. The ignitability of these fuels is correspondingly higher.

The Keetch-Byram Drought Index (KBDI)

Fire managers in Virginia track a separate index — the Keetch-Byram Drought Index — that runs from 0 (complete soil saturation) to 800 (desert-like conditions). It is a key input into the Virginia Department of Forestry’s daily fire-danger rating. As of early May 2026, central Virginia counties have been registering KBDI values in the 400–600 range. Values above 600 are associated with intense burning and the potential for fires to enter the duff layer and burn underground, smoldering for weeks.

Virginia Department of Forestry daily fire-danger class

The DOF issues a daily fire-danger class on a 1–5 scale:

Class	Name	What it means operationally
1	Low	No appreciable activity. Fires do not ignite readily.
2	Moderate	Occasional activity. Fires start from most accidental causes but spread slowly.
3	High	Fires start easily and burn at moderate to fast rates. Control can be difficult.
4	Very High	Fires start easily and burn intensely. Spotting and crowning possible. Initial-attack difficult.
5	Extreme	Red-flag conditions. Fires explosive; expect rapid growth and long-distance spotting.

On Class 4 and 5 days, residents should consider any outdoor flame, sparking equipment (chainsaws without spark arrestors, mowers in dry grass, grinders, welding), or hot exhaust contact with dry fuel to be a credible ignition source. On Class 5 days, even a discarded cigarette in a dry leaf bed can start a running fire.

The 4 PM burning law and Buckingham’s burn ban

Virginia’s statewide 4 PM burning law was in effect from February 15 through April 30, 2026. Under that law, outdoor burning was prohibited between midnight and 4:00 PM in any container not classified as a “fireproof device.” Violations are Class-3 misdemeanors with fines up to \$500, plus liability for suppression costs and property damage if a fire escapes.

As of April 2026, Buckingham County imposed an additional county-level open-air burn ban prohibiting open-air fires, campfires, and burn barrels. Cooking fires were permitted only if the fuel was contained in

a metal or ceramic container, such as a grill. Residents should assume the burn ban remains in effect until officially lifted, and should confirm current status with Buckingham County Emergency Services (434-969-1772) before any planned burning.

Practical takeaway:

Until further notice, no debris burning on any Yogaville-area property. No bonfires or fire pits. No agricultural burning. Check the Virginia DOF daily fire-danger rating before operating any spark-producing equipment outdoors. On Class 4 or 5 days, postpone the work.

Climate-scale context

These conditions are not weather; they are climate. The Mid-Atlantic and Appalachian region has experienced an increasing frequency of drought-plus-wind-plus-fire alignments since the early 2010s, consistent with broader projections of more variable precipitation and increased evaporative demand under warming. Virginia is not California, and there is no reason to anticipate California-scale fires here. But there is every reason to expect that the historical baseline of approximately 700 wildfires and 9,500 burned acres per year in Virginia will continue to drift upward, especially in spring and fall. Building durable community preparedness now is the appropriate response.

3. Virginia's Fire Profile: History and Patterns

The annual baseline

Virginia averages approximately 700 wildfires per year, burning an average of 9,500 acres. The Virginia Department of Forestry suppresses the great majority of these in initial attack. Most are small — under 10 acres — and never make the news. The wildfires that do make the news are the unusual ones.

Two fire seasons dominate the Virginia calendar:

- Spring fire season: roughly February 15 through April 30. Dead leaves on the ground from the previous autumn, low humidity, frequent wind events, and an absence of leaf cover overhead combine to make this the most active wildfire window.
- Fall fire season: roughly October 15 through November 30. Fresh leaf drop, low humidity, drying vegetation, and frequent frontal passages produce a second peak — sometimes more severe than spring, as 2023 demonstrated.

Causation

Approximately 80–90% of Virginia wildfires are human-caused. The leading specific cause is escaped debris burning — a homeowner burning leaves or yard waste, walking inside for a moment, and returning to a fire moving across the lawn. Other significant causes include:

- Equipment use (mowers, chainsaws, tractors, ATVs) producing sparks in dry grass or duff
- Discarded cigarettes and smoking materials

- Campfires, warming fires, and bonfires that were inadequately extinguished
- Burn barrels and trash burning
- Powerline failures, vehicle exhaust contact with dry grass, and other equipment-related ignitions
- Arson (a small but persistent share)
- Lightning (less common in Virginia than in the West; usually a few dozen ignitions per year)

Notable recent Virginia fires

The Matts Creek Fire (Bedford County, November 2023)

Reported the evening of Sunday, November 12, 2023, in the James River Face Wilderness section of the Jefferson National Forest, approximately 5 miles southeast of Glasgow. By Tuesday morning the fire had grown from 15 acres to 150; by midweek, to 2,500; by November 22, to more than 11,000 acres and 57% containment. The Blue Ridge Parkway was closed from milepost 66.3 to milepost 85.9. The Appalachian Trail was closed in a 10-mile segment. Smoke produced air-quality alerts across Bedford, Amherst, Campbell, and Charlottesville areas. No structures were lost. The fire was driven by hardwood fuels, southerly wind, and severe-to-extreme drought conditions — almost exactly the conditions present in central Virginia today.

The Quaker Run Fire (Madison County, October–November 2023)

Started October 24, 2023, near Syria, Virginia. Burned approximately 4,000 acres of private land and Shenandoah National Park land before being contained on November 17. Cause: an escaped debris burn. No structures lost. The fire spread across the rugged eastern slope of the Blue Ridge and required a multi-agency response.

The 2023 fall fire season more broadly

Virginia DOF responded to 113 wildfires that fall season, burning more than 12,000 acres — significantly above the annual average. In addition to Matts Creek and Quaker Run, the Rocklick Fire (Buchanan County, 2,200+ acres), Tuggles Gap (Patrick County, 1,000+ acres), and Rachel's Chapel (Dickenson County, 1,000+ acres) all exceeded 1,000 acres.

Earlier large Virginia fires

Historically, the largest fires in Virginia have generally occurred in the mountainous western part of the state and in the Great Dismal Swamp. The 2008 Great Dismal Swamp Fire burned over 4,800 acres and smoldered in peat for months, requiring inundation of large areas of the swamp to extinguish. The 2011 Lateral West Fire in the same swamp burned over 6,500 acres.

Central Virginia — the Piedmont region in which Yogaville sits — has historically experienced smaller fires than the mountains or the coastal swamps. Most Piedmont wildfires are surface fires moving through hardwood litter, with fewer crown-fire dynamics than in pine-dominated coastal forests or in the rugged terrain of the Blue Ridge. This does not mean the Piedmont is safe; it means the fire behavior is somewhat more tractable and structure-loss historically less common.

Patterns relevant to Yogaville

- Fires in Virginia overwhelmingly start near roads, homes, and recreation areas — wherever humans are.
- Most large Virginia wildfires have occurred during a multi-year drought period or in late-season dry windows.
- Initial-attack failures, when they occur, are almost always associated with wind events or extreme fire-danger days.
- Structures that are lost in Virginia wildfires are almost always lost to embers landing on roofs, in gutters, or on porches — not to direct contact with a flame front.
- The local volunteer fire departments do most of the suppression work in rural Virginia. State and federal resources surge in only on the largest or most complex incidents.

4. The Yogaville Risk Profile

Geography and structures

Satchidananda Ashram–Yogaville occupies approximately 750 acres of forested rolling terrain along the north bank of the James River in northern Buckingham County, near the boundary with Fluvanna and Albemarle counties. The property is bounded by hardwood forest on most sides and by the James River to the south. Access is primarily via Yogaville Way (108 Yogaville Way), which connects to State Route 604.

The structures on the property include:

- The LOTUS Shrine (Light Of Truth Universal Shrine), the architectural and spiritual centerpiece of Yogaville. Currently undergoing restoration work. Dedicated in 1986. Lotus-shaped, with gold-leafed dome.
- The Yogaville Ashram, including the dining hall, kitchen, library, office building, monastery, and maintenance facilities.
- Guest accommodations (dormitories and shared rooms).
- The Yoga Shala / community room at 76 The Way (this meeting's location).
- Multiple householder residences in the surrounding Yogaville community — many of which sit on wooded lots adjacent to the ashram property.
- The Way Inn LLC and other short-term-rental properties operated by community members.
- Outbuildings, storage, and the Sivananda Hall teaching facility.

The Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI)

Yogaville is a textbook example of what fire managers call the Wildland-Urban Interface, or WUI: a community where structures abut undeveloped, vegetated land. WUI fires are the dominant structure-loss scenario in American wildfire history. The Camp Fire (Paradise, California, 2018), the Marshall Fire (Boulder County, Colorado, 2021), and the Maui fires (Lahaina, Hawaii, 2023) were all WUI events. The lesson from each is the same: ember showers driven by wind can ignite homes a half mile or

more from a flame front, and the homes that survive are the ones with maintained defensible space, ember-resistant construction details, and well-prepared residents.

Population dynamics

Yogaville is approximately 200 permanent residents. During programs and major events, this number can swell to several hundred. The transient population creates two distinct preparedness challenges:

- Program guests do not know the property. They will not know which way to walk to a meeting place. They will not know where to find a fire extinguisher. They will not have local cell coverage configured.
- Residents who have been there for decades may not register that their familiar surroundings have changed — that a dead tree leaning over the path is a hazard, that a smoke alarm hasn't chirped in years because the battery has been dead since 2019.

Special considerations

- Elderly residents and residents with mobility limitations. The ashram has a significant population over 65, some of whom may need assistance during an evacuation.
- Children. Smaller numbers, but their presence shifts the calculus for any evacuation plan.
- Residential program participants. May be in retreat, may be in silence, may not be carrying phones — and may not register external alerts as urgent.
- Pets and animals on individual properties. Some residences have cats, dogs, chickens, or other animals that require planning.
- Vehicles. Not every resident has a personal vehicle; some are dependent on rides for any evacuation.
- The James River as both an asset and a constraint. It provides a southern fire break and a water source, but it also limits escape routes to the south.
- Single primary access road. Like many rural communities, Yogaville is dependent on Yogaville Way for both ingress and egress. Loss of this road in a fire would be a serious complication.

Cell coverage and communications

Cellular reception on the property is variable. Some carriers have good coverage in some buildings; others are unreliable across the entire property. WiFi is available in most ashram buildings but does not cover outdoor areas or many of the householder residences. This has direct implications for any emergency communication plan — see Part IV.

Part II — Meeting Agenda & Facilitation

5. Recommended Agenda for May 17

The community announcement scheduled the meeting from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM. The agenda below proposes a structure for those two hours that balances information delivery, conversation, decision-making, and a clear path to follow-up action. Timing is approximate; the facilitator's job is to let conversation breathe where it needs to and to keep momentum where it is flagging.

The structure at a glance

Time	Block	Lead
9:30–10:00	Arrival, coffee/tea, sign-in, name tags, hand out the One-Page Summary	Greeters
10:00–10:10	Welcome, opening intention, introductions (round robin)	Galen
10:10–10:25	Why this meeting, why now: the drought, the fire picture	Erik
10:25–10:45	Home and neighborhood fire safety basics	Erik / Galen
10:45–10:55	Local response: fire stations, county, emergency alerts	Erik
10:55–11:05	Break (stretch, refill, sign up for things at the resource table)	—
11:05–11:20	Phone tree and communication systems — design and sign-up	Galen
11:20–11:35	Volunteer roles, committee, next steps	Erik / Galen
11:35–11:55	Open Q&A and discussion	Both
11:55–12:00	Commitments, closing, follow-up plan	Galen

Block-by-block notes

9:30–10:00 • Pre-meeting expo and sign-in

People arrive early. Use the time. Set out a resource table with:

- Sign-in sheet (name, email, phone, household location, willingness to be a phone-tree captain — checkbox)
- The One-Page Summary handout (see Part X)
- The Home Fire Safety Checklist (see Part X)
- A Buckingham County emergency alert sign-up sheet, with a tablet or laptop set up to do it on the spot
- Volunteer interest cards

- Smoke alarm batteries to give away if available (9V or AA, depending on what people have at home)

Name tags help — particularly given that the meeting includes both ashram residents and householder neighbors who may not know each other.

10:00–10:10 • Welcome, intention, introductions

Galen welcomes the room and frames the meeting briefly. A single sentence is enough: “We are gathering because conditions on the ground have changed and we want our community to be ready.” Then a moment of silence or a brief invocation, as is appropriate to this community. Then a round-robin: name, where you live in relation to Yogaville, and one fire safety question you came with.

The round-robin is the most important ten minutes of the meeting. It surfaces real concerns, lets people feel that the meeting is theirs, and gives the facilitators a working list of questions to address. Capture the questions on a whiteboard or flip chart as they are spoken.

10:10–10:25 • Why now: the drought and the fire picture

Erik presents Part I’s material in compressed form. Fifteen minutes; slides optional. Key talking points:

- Where the U.S. Drought Monitor puts Buckingham right now (D3 — extreme)
- The 2025–2026 rainfall deficit and what it means for fuels on our land
- The VA DOF daily fire-danger ratings and how to read them
- The Buckingham County burn ban and what it means in practice
- Brief reference to Matts Creek (2023) and Quaker Run (2023) as recent reminders that significant fires happen in Virginia
- 80–90% of Virginia wildfires are human-caused; this is the lever we can pull

Avoid alarmism. The data speaks for itself. The job here is to put accurate context in front of people, not to frighten anyone.

10:25–10:45 • Home and neighborhood fire safety basics

Twenty minutes on the practical content. Cover:

- The Home Ignition Zone (0–5, 5–30, 30–100 feet) — what to clear in each
- Smoke alarms and CO detectors: where, how many, how to test, when to replace
- Fire extinguishers: types (A, B, C, ABC), PASS technique, where to keep them
- Top home fire causes: cooking, heating, electrical, smoking — and what to do about each
- Two-ways-out home escape plan with an outdoor meeting place
- When to fight a fire and when to leave (the answer is almost always: leave, then call 911 from outside)

If a representative from Glenmore VFD or Buckingham Emergency Services can attend, give them this block. The credibility of a uniformed firefighter standing in front of the room walking through a fire extinguisher demonstration is worth more than any slide deck.

10:45–10:55 • Local response and emergency alerts

Ten minutes on the infrastructure that surrounds us:

- The closest fire stations and what to expect for response time
- Buckingham County Emergency Services (434-969-1772) and what they do
- How to sign up for Buckingham County emergency alerts (and a station at the back of the room to do it now)
- CodeRED and how it works
- What to say when you call 911 from Yogaville (address: 108 Yogaville Way, Buckingham, VA 23921; nearest cross street; description of fire/incident; whether structures are threatened)

10:55–11:05 • Break

A real break. Ten minutes. Stretching, restrooms, refill of water/tea, time to chat with the firefighter if one is present. Two minutes before resuming, ring a bell.

11:05–11:20 • Phone tree and communication

Galen walks through the phone-tree design from Part IV. The goal of this block is not to finalize the tree but to:

- Get people's buy-in on the structure
- Recruit at least one captain per geographic cluster
- Collect contact info for everyone present
- Set the date for the first phone-tree test (suggested: within 30 days)

11:20–11:35 • Volunteer roles and committee

Erik presents the volunteer role list from Part V. The goal:

- Recruit a Fire Safety Committee Convener
- Recruit committee members (target: 3–5)
- Identify volunteers for specific roles (alarm-battery-distributor, defensible-space-walkthrough leader, after-action-notes-taker, etc.)
- Set the date and location for the first committee meeting (suggested: within 14 days)

11:35–11:55 • Open Q&A and discussion

Twenty minutes for the questions that haven't been answered yet — both the ones captured on the whiteboard at the start and the ones that have surfaced during the meeting. The facilitators' job here is to keep the conversation moving, draw out quieter voices, and not pretend to know things they don't.

If a representative from the fire department is present, this is their block as much as anyone's. Their lived expertise is worth more than the facilitators' research.

Park questions that cannot be answered in the room. Add them to a "to follow up" list that becomes part of the post-meeting summary.

11:55–12:00 • Commitments and closing

Five minutes. Galen reads back the commitments made during the meeting:

- Phone-tree captains who have signed up (by name)
- Committee convener and members (by name)
- Date and location of first committee meeting
- Date of phone-tree test
- Specific volunteer commitments
- Date of follow-up community meeting

Then a closing — a short reading, a chant, a moment of silence, or simply a thank-you. This is the only block that doesn't need to be efficient. Take the moment that is appropriate.

6. Facilitation Notes for Galen and Erik

Two-host facilitation

With two co-hosts, one of you should be the “anchor” at any given moment — holding the structure, calling on people, watching the clock — while the other listens and adds substance. Trade off block by block as the agenda above suggests. When questions come up that you don't know the answer to, say so. Park it. Move on.

The temperament of the room

This community has lived together for years and brings a particular tone — contemplative, careful, sometimes a little oblique. Honor that. Don't over-corporate the meeting. Allow silences. Don't fill them. At the same time, don't let process eat the substance — there is real work to do and people will appreciate decisions getting made.

Watch for

- The over-talker. Gently redirect: “Thank you — I want to make sure we hear from others too. We can pick up on this in the break.”
- The expert-from-elsewhere. Welcome their experience; do not let them drive the conversation away from local conditions and local solutions.
- Skepticism. Some people will arrive doubting that anything will come of this. Their skepticism is reasonable. The answer is not argument; the answer is to make concrete commitments by 12:00 and follow through on them.
- Anxiety. Drought and fire conversations can activate real fear. Stay grounded yourself, keep your voice steady, give people something specific to do.

Things to have on hand

- Sign-in sheets (clipboards, pens)
- Name tags and markers

- Flip chart or whiteboard and markers
- Printed copies of: the One-Page Summary, Home Fire Safety Checklist, Phone-Tree Sign-Up form, Volunteer Interest cards, Emergency Contact Sheet
- A laptop or tablet for live Buckingham County alert sign-up
- Water, tea, light snacks
- A fire extinguisher to demonstrate (borrowed from a building if needed; can be expired for demo purposes if labeled clearly)
- A working smoke alarm and a battery, for demonstration

7. Opening Framing and Closing

Suggested opening (sample language)

“Welcome. Thank you for coming on a Sunday morning. We’ve been in extreme drought conditions in this part of Virginia for some weeks now, and several of us — talking informally over the past month — realized that as a community we don’t have a clear shared picture of how prepared we are for a fire on or near the property. That’s the reason for this meeting.”

“The goal today is not to frighten anyone. The goal is to walk out of this room at noon with a few concrete things in place — a phone tree, a small committee, some people who have volunteered for specific roles, and everyone signed up for the county’s emergency alert system. That’s it. The rest is conversation.”

“Let’s start with a moment of silence, and then go around the room. Please share your name, where you live in relation to Yogaville, and one fire safety question you came with this morning.”

Suggested closing

“Here’s what we’re leaving with this morning: [read the commitments]. The Fire Safety Committee will meet on [date] at [time and location]. The phone tree will be tested on [date]. The post-meeting summary, including all the handouts and a list of next steps, will go out by email within a week.”

“Thank you, all of you, for taking a Sunday morning to do this. Preparedness, done together, is one of the kindest things a community can do for itself. Om Shanti.”

Part III — Local Emergency Response Infrastructure

8. Closest Fire Stations and Response Considerations

Yogaville is located at 108 Yogaville Way, Buckingham, VA 23921 (approximately 37.67° N, 78.69° W). The fire stations below are listed in order of approximate driving distance from the ashram. All are volunteer departments. Response times will vary based on time of day, day of week, weather, and the location of available crews when a call comes in.

Station	Address	Distance / Direction	Phone
Glenmore Fire Department (Buckingham VFD, Co. 4)	179 Firehouse Rd, Buckingham, VA 23921	~5 miles east	434-969-2317
Buckingham EMS Glenmore	1625 Glenmore Rd, Scottsville, VA 24562	~5 miles east	434-983-3670
Scottsville Volunteer Fire (Albemarle County)	141 Irish Rd, Scottsville, VA 24590	~12 miles north (across river)	434-286-2841
Arvonnia Fire Department (Buckingham VFD, Co. 3)	46 Boxwood Drive Rd, Arvonnia, VA 23004	~17 miles east	434-983-3484 (admin)
Dillwyn Fire Department (Buckingham VFD, Co. 1)	15896 N James Madison Hwy, Dillwyn, VA 23936	~17 miles south	434-983-3484
Toga Volunteer Fire Department (Buckingham VFD, Co. 2)	Sprouses Corner, VA 23936	~17 miles south	—
Buckingham County Emergency Services (admin)	13380 W James Anderson Hwy, Buckingham, VA 23921	~10 miles south	434-969-1772

What this means in practice

The Glenmore Fire Department, at approximately 5 miles east on Firehouse Road, is by a clear margin the closest fire-suppression resource to Yogaville. In a structure-fire scenario, a Glenmore engine — under good road conditions and with crew immediately available — could be on scene within 8 to 15 minutes of dispatch. In any all-volunteer system, however, “time to dispatch” itself depends on who is available to respond to the page; an early-morning weekday call may see a longer response than a weekend afternoon call.

For wildland fire response, the Virginia Department of Forestry maintains a state-wide initial-attack capability, with dispatch coordinated through the DOF and local 911. Buckingham County’s DOF service area is responsive but, like everywhere in Virginia, capacity is finite during high-fire-danger periods. On

Class 4 and 5 days, multiple ignitions across the region compete for a constrained pool of resources. This is one of several reasons that prevention is preferable to suppression.

In any major incident — fire, severe storm, mass-casualty — Buckingham County would coordinate through its Emergency Operations Plan, run by the Department of Emergency Services (Cody Davis, Chief; Charles Kirby, Emergency Management Coordinator).

Mutual aid

Volunteer departments in central Virginia operate under mutual-aid agreements that cross county lines. In a significant Yogaville-area incident, you might see apparatus and personnel from Glenmore (Buckingham), Scottsville (Albemarle), Dillwyn (Buckingham), and possibly Cumberland County or Fluvanna County departments arrive in concert. This is normal and good — the system is designed to surge for big incidents.

Building a working relationship now, before an incident

One of the most valuable things this committee can do over the next 60 days is to build a direct relationship with Glenmore VFD and with Buckingham Emergency Services. Specifically:

- Invite Chief Cody Davis (Buckingham Emergency Services) or his designee to attend a follow-up community meeting and walk the ashram grounds
- Ask Glenmore VFD whether they conduct free home safety assessments and free smoke alarm installations — many Virginia volunteer departments do, and they are happy to be invited
- Ask whether the department has a community risk-reduction officer (some do; many smaller departments share one regionally)
- Offer to host a tour of the ashram for Glenmore personnel so they have a current mental map of the buildings, water sources, access routes, and population density
- Provide them with a Yogaville site map — including the location of fire extinguishers, propane tanks, key shut-offs, and any vulnerable-population locations

The two phone numbers everyone in the community should have:

911 — in any actual emergency, always.

434-969-1772 — Buckingham County Emergency Services (admin/non-emergency).

(Glenmore VFD: 434-969-2317 — for non-emergency station business.)

9. Buckingham County Emergency Services

Buckingham County's emergency management function is housed within the Buckingham County Department of Emergency Services. Their core responsibilities are emergency planning, public alerting, coordination across the volunteer fire and EMS departments in the county, and serving as the county's point of contact with the Virginia Department of Emergency Management and federal partners (FEMA, NWS, etc.).

Key contacts

- Cody Davis — Department of Emergency Services Chief — cdavis@buckinghamcounty.virginia.gov — 434-969-7734
- Charles Kirby — Emergency Management Coordinator (and E-911 addressing) — ckirby@buckinghamcounty.virginia.gov — 434-969-4242
- Main administrative phone — 434-969-1772
- Physical address — 13380 W James Anderson Hwy, Buckingham, VA 23921

What they do, what they don't do

Buckingham Emergency Services does not field fire engines or ambulances directly — that is the work of the volunteer fire and EMS companies in Dillwyn, Glenmore, Arvonnia, Toga, and the Buckingham EMS units. Emergency Services coordinates, plans, and alerts. They are the right point of contact for:

- Sign-up for county-wide emergency alerts
- Pre-incident planning and walkthrough requests
- Questions about the county's Emergency Operations Plan
- E-911 addressing concerns
- Burn ban status and updates
- Coordination of community emergency-preparedness efforts (CERT-like work)

10. Emergency Alerts and CodeRED

Buckingham County, like most Virginia counties, operates an emergency alert system that can push messages by phone call, text, and email to residents who have signed up. Many counties in the region use the CodeRED platform; some use IPAWS-WEA (Wireless Emergency Alerts) for federally driven alerts. In either case, sign-up is free, and signing up is one of the single most valuable preparedness actions a household can take.

What you will receive

- Severe weather warnings (severe thunderstorms, tornadoes, flash floods)
- Evacuation notices
- Hazardous-materials alerts
- Boil-water notices
- Missing-child (AMBER) and missing-persons (Senior Alert) notifications
- County-specific public-safety advisories

How to sign up

6. Go to the Buckingham County website (buckinghamcountyva.org) and navigate to Emergency Services → Emergency Alerts.

7. Click the sign-up link and complete the registration form: name, primary and alternate phone numbers (including cell), email, and the physical address(es) at which you want to receive alerts (home, work, other).
8. Choose your preferred contact methods. Phone calls reach landlines automatically; cell phones must be opted in.
9. If you have any trouble registering, call the Buckingham County office (or, depending on which system the county uses, the alternate registration shown on the website). For assistance, contact ckirby@buckinghamcounty.virginia.gov.

Action item for May 17:

Set up a tablet or laptop at the resource table with the Buckingham County alert sign-up page already loaded. Have one volunteer assigned to help any attendee complete the sign-up before they leave the room. Realistic target: 100% of attendees signed up by 12:00.

Other alert channels

- Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA): federal alerts automatically delivered to cell phones in an affected area. No sign-up required, but check your phone's settings: Settings → Notifications → Government Alerts (iOS) or Settings → Apps & Notifications → Advanced → Wireless Emergency Alerts (Android). Most are on by default.
- NOAA Weather Radio: a battery-backed weather radio remains one of the most reliable severe-weather alerting tools and is worth having in the dining hall, the main office, and at least one residence per cluster.
- Local broadcast media: in any significant Buckingham County incident, expect coverage on 95.7 WFLO FM, 105.3 WBNN FM, and TV stations NBC 12, NBC 29, ABC 8, and CBS 6.
- Virginia Department of Forestry — daily fire-danger ratings posted at dof.virginia.gov.
- U.S. Drought Monitor — drought.gov; updated weekly on Thursdays.
- National Interagency Fire Center — nifc.gov — for status of any large-incident fires nationally and regionally.

Part IV — Community Communication Systems

11. Building a Phone Tree: Design Principles

A phone tree is a deliberately structured cascade of phone calls designed to deliver an urgent message to every member of a community in the shortest practical time. Phone trees pre-date cell phones; they pre-date the internet. They remain useful because they are simple, robust, do not depend on any third-party infrastructure, and can be activated when other systems fail.

Why a phone tree, when we have CodeRED?

County-level alerting (CodeRED, WEA, etc.) is excellent for what it does: pushing messages from authorities to residents. It is less good at:

- Distinguishing between “the county is on alert” and “the brush behind your specific house is on fire”
- Reaching people who happen to be in a no-signal zone of the property
- Conveying community-specific information (the access road is blocked at the curve by the Lotus; meet at the parking lot at the dining hall)
- Confirming that a person actually got the message and is taking action

A community phone tree complements the county alert system. It is also a practice in mutual care: when you call your neighbor at 3:00 AM, the call itself is part of the help.

Design principles

- Redundancy. Every household should be on at least two paths — i.e., be reachable from at least two callers. If one captain is asleep, away, or unreachable, the message still moves.
- Reciprocity. Every household calls and is called. No purely passive participants.
- Locality. Captains call neighbors close to them. Geographic proximity supports both faster communication and the possibility of in-person follow-up.
- Brevity. The phone-tree script is short and identical from caller to caller. Specificity belongs in a follow-up message, not the alert call.
- Confirmation. The chain doesn’t end with a voicemail. If a caller can’t reach someone, they call the next person in the chain and also note the non-contact, so a follow-up can happen in person if warranted.
- Practice. A phone tree that has never been tested is not a phone tree. Schedule the first test within 30 days, then twice a year.

12. Phone Tree Implementation

Step 1: Identify clusters

Divide the Yogaville community into geographic clusters of roughly 5 to 12 households each. Suggested initial cluster lines (to be confirmed with attendees on May 17):

- Ashram core (residents of monastery, ashram dorms, and on-property housing)
- The Way / Yogaville Way householders (the immediate residential cluster including 76 The Way)
- River-side householders (homes on the river side of Yogaville Way)
- Outer Yogaville and adjacent neighbors (households reached via 604 / connecting roads)
- Short-term rental properties and seasonal residents (kept informed but not expected to be active callers)

The exact lines should reflect actual road geography and neighbor-knows-neighbor relationships. The map should be drawn by people who actually live there.

Step 2: Recruit two captains per cluster

Each cluster needs two captains — a primary and a backup. Captains agree to:

- Maintain the current contact list for their cluster
- Receive alerts from the central convener (or, in some scenarios, from the fire department or county directly)
- Make the calls to their cluster within an agreed timeframe (target: 15 minutes from receipt)
- Confirm to the convener when their cluster has been notified
- Flag any household that could not be reached so an in-person check-in can happen if needed

Two captains per cluster is the redundancy that makes the system actually work. One captain is a single point of failure; two captains can swap, support each other, and cover for each other's travel and sleep.

Step 3: Build the tree structure

Below is a sample structure for a 30-household community organized into 4 clusters. Adapt to the actual community composition.

Level	Role	Number	Calls
1	Activation point (Convener)	1 person	All 4 cluster captains (primary + backup = 8 calls)
2	Cluster captains (primary)	4 people	Each captain calls 5–8 households in their cluster
2	Cluster captains (backup)	4 people	Each backup also calls half the cluster; redundancy
3	Households	~30 households	Each household confirms receipt to its caller

Step 4: Define activation triggers

Be explicit about what triggers the phone tree. Examples of appropriate triggers:

- A wildfire reported on or within 1 mile of Yogaville property

- A structure fire on the ashram or in the Yogaville residential community
- Evacuation order or warning from Buckingham County for the Yogaville area
- Red Flag Warning combined with a credible local ignition
- Tornado warning, severe-storm warning, or flash-flood warning affecting the immediate area
- Power outage expected to last more than 24 hours during extreme weather
- Other community-safety emergencies (chemical spill on Route 20, river contamination, etc.)

Not every alert needs the phone tree. A 20-minute power outage does not. A burn-ban update can wait for email. The phone tree is for urgent, time-sensitive, action-requiring information.

Step 5: Standardize the script

Sample phone-tree script:

"This is [Name] calling from the Yogaville fire safety phone tree. [Time and date]. There is [a wildfire reported / an evacuation warning / etc.] affecting [area]. The current guidance is [stay alert / prepare to evacuate / evacuate now via Yogaville Way to Route 20]."

"Please call [next person in the tree if applicable] and confirm they received this message. If you cannot reach them, call [convener's name and number]. Are you safe right now? Do you need help evacuating?"

"The next update will come [within 30 minutes / when conditions change / by sunrise]. Om Shanti."

Step 6: Test, log, refine

Test the phone tree within 30 days of activation. Then twice a year on a fixed schedule (suggested: the first Saturday in May and the first Saturday in October — aligned with the Virginia spring and fall fire seasons). Each test should generate a one-page after-action note that captures:

- Time of activation by the convener
- Time each captain received the alert
- Time each household received the alert
- Households not reached (and why)
- Recommended changes to the tree

13. Backup Communication Channels

The phone tree is the primary mechanism. The backups are at least as important.

Group text or chat (WhatsApp, Signal, or Yogaville-specific platform)

A community group on WhatsApp or Signal serves three useful functions: announcement (everyone sees it at once), confirmation (people respond with a thumbs-up), and lower-urgency information (the burn ban is lifted, the wind shifted, the road reopened). Set it up with clear ground rules: messages from the convener and captains for safety information only. Avoid noise; protect the channel for the cases that matter.

Recommendation: stand up a Yogaville Fire Safety group on WhatsApp or Signal within 30 days, with the convener and the cluster captains as admins. Invite all residents who want to be in the group. Keep it separate from any general community-news channels.

Email

Email is appropriate for routine and non-urgent communications: after-action notes, meeting announcements, agenda updates, burn ban changes that are not immediate, monthly preparedness tips. Email is not appropriate for active-incident alerting (too slow, too easy to miss).

Radios (FRS/GMRS)

In any extended incident — wildfire, severe storm, prolonged power outage — cellular networks may degrade or fail. Consider equipping the convener and cluster captains with FRS or GMRS handheld radios. FRS radios are license-free; GMRS radios require a \$35 family license but have higher power. Both can communicate reliably across 1–3 miles in wooded terrain. Set a primary and secondary channel (e.g., GMRS 16 primary, GMRS 8 backup); print the channel chart and the radio etiquette on a laminated card for each carrier.

In-person check-ins

When digital and electronic systems fail, walking matters. The cluster structure makes it possible: if you cannot reach the household at the end of the road, the captain (or a designee) walks or drives to the door. This is especially important for elderly residents, residents in retreat, residents who may not have heard a phone, and residents with limited mobility.

The dining hall and shrine bells

Yogaville has bells. In an immediate emergency on the ashram grounds, ringing the dining hall bell repeatedly (or another agreed-upon pattern) can alert everyone in earshot to gather. This is a complement to electronic alerting, not a replacement. The committee should consider whether a specific bell pattern should be designated as an emergency signal — and ensure that pattern is taught to everyone on the property, including program participants on arrival.

Out-of-area contact

Every household should designate an out-of-area contact — a relative or friend in another state. In a major incident, local lines often jam but long-distance calls and texts often go through. The out-of-area contact serves as a check-in point: if you can text “I’m safe” to your sister in Oregon, she can confirm to anyone who calls her that you are accounted for.

Part V — Volunteer Roles

14. What Volunteers Are Needed For

The community's preparedness will not be advanced by Galen and Erik alone. It will be advanced by a working group of residents who each take responsibility for a piece of the larger puzzle. Below is a menu of volunteer roles, organized by function. The goal is not to fill every role on May 17; the goal is to find the people who are willing to lead the most important roles, and to let the rest emerge over the following 60 days.

Tier 1: Roles to fill on May 17

Fire Safety Committee Convener

- Time commitment: 4–6 hours/month, ongoing
- Skills needed: organized, follow-through, comfortable convening meetings
- Responsibilities: schedules and runs the monthly committee meeting; maintains the committee's working notes and decisions; serves as the primary external point of contact with Buckingham Emergency Services and Glenmore VFD; reports out to the community via email after each committee meeting

Phone Tree Convener

- Time commitment: 1–2 hours/month, ongoing; surge time during any actual activation
- Skills needed: reliable, available, calm under pressure, comfortable making decisions quickly
- Responsibilities: maintains the master phone tree spreadsheet; activates the tree when triggers are met; coordinates the cluster captains; runs the semi-annual tests; updates contact information

Cluster Captains (at least one primary and one backup per cluster — typically 4 clusters)

- Time commitment: 30 minutes/month routine; surge during activation
- Skills needed: knows their neighbors, reliable, willing to make phone calls
- Responsibilities: maintains the contact list for their cluster; makes the calls in any activation; flags non-contacts; participates in semi-annual tests

Tier 2: Roles to fill in the 30 days following May 17

Defensible Space Coordinator

- Time commitment: 8–12 hours total to launch; periodic thereafter
- Skills needed: practical, willing to walk properties, comfortable having direct conversations with neighbors about their property
- Responsibilities: organizes a community "defensible space day" in late spring or early summer; coordinates group brush clearance, leaf removal, and gutter cleaning; partners with the ashram's grounds team for any on-property work; documents what is done

Home Safety Check Coordinator

- Time commitment: 4–6 hours/month for 3 months, then quarterly
- Skills needed: organized; comfortable scheduling visits; respectful of household autonomy
- Responsibilities: coordinates a voluntary home-safety walk-through program; partners with Glenmore VFD or Buckingham Emergency Services for free home assessments; maintains a (confidential) tracker of which households have completed assessments; gives away smoke alarms and CO detectors as available

Smoke Alarm and Battery Distributor

- Time commitment: 2–4 hours/month
- Skills needed: organized; willing to receive shipments and distribute
- Responsibilities: orders or sources smoke alarms, CO detectors, 9V batteries, and AA batteries as a small inventory; distributes to households as needed; tracks what has been distributed

Training & Drill Coordinator

- Time commitment: 6–8 hours per drill
- Skills needed: organized; able to plan and run group activities
- Responsibilities: coordinates fire extinguisher training (typically led by VFD personnel); organizes a community evacuation drill within 90 days; plans seasonal preparedness events

Special Populations Liaison

- Time commitment: 2–4 hours/month
- Skills needed: discreet, sensitive, organized; existing relationships with elderly or mobility-limited community members
- Responsibilities: maintains a (confidential) list of residents who may need assistance in an evacuation; pre-identifies neighbors who can provide assistance; works with the ashram for any residents under their care; ensures that program participants in long-term retreat have a designated check-in person

Resource Tracker

- Time commitment: 2–3 hours/month
- Skills needed: organized, comfortable with spreadsheets
- Responsibilities: maintains an inventory of community fire safety resources — extinguishers, smoke alarms, first aid kits, NOAA weather radios, radios, generator, water sources, etc.

Tier 3: Ongoing and seasonal roles

Communications/Newsletter Contributor

- Time commitment: 1–2 hours/month
- Responsibilities: drafts a monthly fire safety tip or update for the Village Sangha Association email; maintains a simple resource page or shared document

After-Action and Documentation Lead

- Time commitment: variable; surges after events

- Responsibilities: takes notes at committee meetings; drafts after-action summaries of drills and any actual activations; maintains the historical record

Fire Department Liaison

- Time commitment: 2–4 hours/quarter
- Responsibilities: maintains a working relationship with Glenmore VFD and Buckingham Emergency Services; invites them to community events; ensures they have current information about the ashram (access, vulnerable populations, key contacts)

Seasonal preparedness coordinators (optional)

- Spring fire season coordinator (February–April)
- Hurricane season coordinator (June–November)
- Fall fire season coordinator (October–November)
- Winter heating/CO season coordinator (November–February)

15. Skill-Matching and Recruitment

At the meeting itself, use a simple Volunteer Interest card (see Part X for template) that lists each role with a one-line description and a checkbox. Ask people to fill them out before they leave the room. The committee convener (whoever is recruited on May 17) follows up within 7 days with anyone who checked a box.

A few honest observations about recruiting volunteers in a community like this:

- People say yes when the ask is concrete, the time commitment is named, and the role has a clear end point.
- People say yes when they are asked directly, by someone they know, who is also doing something.
- People say no when the role is vague (“we need help with fire safety”) or when the time commitment is unbounded.
- Pre-identifying likely candidates in conversation before the meeting, rather than relying on cold sign-ups, is generally more productive.

The Convener and any tier-1 roles ideally have someone in mind to invite before May 17 — and that person ideally has said yes already, so the ask in the room is a confirmation rather than a recruitment.

Part VI — Highest Priorities

16. The Priority Hierarchy

Not everything can be done at once. The community has finite attention, finite volunteer capacity, and a meeting that lasts two hours. The priorities below are sequenced by both urgency (how time-sensitive each is given current fire conditions) and impact (how much risk reduction each delivers per unit of effort).

Tier 1: This week (May 17–24)

These items have the highest urgency-impact ratio and should be completed by every household and by the committee within the first seven days after the meeting.

Action	Owner	Why this matters most
Test every smoke alarm in the home	Each household	Detectors prevent deaths from sleeping inhalation. Most fire fatalities occur in homes with non-working alarms.
Locate and check expiration on fire extinguishers	Each household	Knowing where they are and that they work is most of the battle.
Sign up for Buckingham County emergency alerts	Each household	Free, fast, foundational. No other system reaches you as reliably.
Draw a simple home escape plan with two ways out per room	Each household	The cognitive work is most of the work. Doing it once now saves seconds when it counts.
Confirm contact info on the phone tree	Each household	The tree only works if the numbers are right.
Convene the Fire Safety Committee for its first meeting	Convener	Sustains the momentum from May 17.
Send post-meeting summary to the VSA list	Erik/Galen	Captures the commitments; lets non-attendees join in.

Tier 2: Within 30 days (by mid-June)

Action	Owner	Notes
Replace smoke alarms older than 10 years; install a CO detector if absent	Each household; Distributor supports	Service life matters. Sensor degrades.
Practice a home fire drill (two ways out, meet outside)	Each household	Practice once. Twice a year ideal.

Action	Owner	Notes
Clear leaves, dead vegetation, and combustibles within 5 feet of every dwelling	Each household; Defensible Space Coordinator supports	The 0–5 foot zone is the single highest-leverage intervention.
Clean gutters and roof valleys	Each household	Ember-driven roof ignitions are the dominant structure-loss mechanism.
Install or verify house numbers visible from the road	Each household	Responders cannot help you if they cannot find you.
Run the first phone-tree test	Phone Tree Convener	Within 30 days. Log results.
Schedule a site visit / walkthrough with Glenmore VFD or Buckingham EM	Committee Convener	Builds the relationship. Gives them current intel.
Inventory ashram-wide fire extinguishers; service or replace as needed	Resource Tracker + ashram facilities	Confirm service tags within last year. Replace anything expired.
Inventory smoke and CO alarms in all ashram buildings	Resource Tracker	Build a simple matrix: location, install date, last test.

Tier 3: Within 90 days (by mid-August)

Action	Owner	Notes
Conduct a community evacuation drill	Training & Drill Coordinator	Pick a Saturday morning. Practice the routes. Time it. Debrief.
Defensible Space Workday (community-wide)	Defensible Space Coordinator	Half-day; chipper rental if budget allows; potluck after.
Fire extinguisher training session	Training & Drill Coordinator + VFD	Live extinguisher discharge in a controlled outdoor setting.
Complete free home safety assessments for any household that wants one	Home Safety Check Coordinator	Partner with VFD; many do this free.
Distribute go-bag checklists; help residents who want to assemble them	Newsletter Contributor + Coordinator	Provide a printed list (Part X); offer a building party.
Set up the Signal/WhatsApp Yogaville Fire Safety group	Phone Tree Convener	Active by 60 days; admins set; ground rules posted.

Action	Owner	Notes
Establish the Special Populations roster (confidential)	Special Populations Liaison	Identify residents who may need help; pre-assign supporters.
Acquire 4–6 FRS/GMRS handheld radios for captains and convener	Resource Tracker	Modest budget item. Test on the property.
Draft a Yogaville Site Map for emergency responders	Committee Convener	Show buildings, water sources, propane, hazards, vulnerable-population locations.

Tier 4: Within 6 months and beyond

Action	Owner	Notes
Explore Firewise USA recognition for the community	Committee	Voluntary national framework; offers structure, recognition, sometimes grants.
Develop a written Community Emergency Preparedness Plan	Committee	Captures what we have built. Updated annually.
Establish annual rhythm: spring meeting + fall meeting	Committee	Continuity. Twice-yearly drills aligned to fire seasons.
Pursue any available state or federal funding for community wildfire mitigation	Committee + AgniWellCare	VA DOF has occasional grant programs; FEMA BRIC may apply.
Cross-train neighbors in basic first aid / CPR / Stop the Bleed	Training & Drill Coordinator	Multiplier for community resilience.
Establish post-fire/post-incident recovery protocol	Committee	What to do if there is an incident. Phone tree, mutual aid, insurance support.

17. The Single Most Important Thing

If everything else falls away, the single most important thing every household can do in the next seven days is this:

Test your smoke alarms.

If any do not respond, replace the battery. If after a fresh battery they still do not respond, or if any alarm is more than 10 years old, replace the unit. Then sit down with whoever you live with for 15 minutes and walk through the two ways out of every room.

Most home-fire deaths are sleep-time inhalation deaths in homes whose smoke alarms were not working. This single action has saved more lives than every fire-extinguisher discharge in American history combined.

Part VII — Home and Property Fire Safety

18. Defensible Space and the Home Ignition Zone

The single most important wildfire concept for a Yogaville resident to understand is the Home Ignition Zone, developed by fire scientist Dr. Jack Cohen at the U.S. Forest Service Missoula Fire Sciences Laboratory and now codified in NFPA standards and in the Firewise USA program. The HIZ divides the area around a structure into three zones, with different intervention priorities in each.

Zone 1: The Immediate Zone (0–5 feet from the structure)

This is the highest-priority zone. Embers landing in this zone are the leading cause of structure ignition in wildfires. Everything within 5 feet of the building should be non-combustible or kept entirely clear:

- Remove all dead leaves and pine needles from the roof and gutters
- Clear leaves and combustible debris from beneath decks and porches
- Move firewood, lumber, and any combustible storage at least 30 feet from the house
- Remove or replace combustible mulch within 5 feet of the foundation; use rock, gravel, or bare soil instead
- Trim vegetation back from siding; no plants touching the building
- Screen vents with 1/8-inch metal mesh to prevent ember intrusion
- Replace combustible (e.g., jute or natural fiber) doormats with non-combustible alternatives
- Keep combustible patio furniture (cushions, wicker) away from windows on red-flag days

Zone 2: The Intermediate Zone (5–30 feet)

The goal in this zone is to break up the continuity of fuels so a fire cannot easily spread to the structure:

- Keep grass and weeds mowed to 4 inches or less
- Remove “ladder fuels” — vegetation that allows a surface fire to climb into tree canopies (e.g., shrubs growing under trees)
- Space trees and tree groupings — for hardwood-dominated terrain like Yogaville, aim for 10+ feet of horizontal clearance between canopies
- Remove dead branches and accumulated needle drop
- Create breaks (driveways, walkways, lawn) that interrupt continuous fuel
- Keep propane tanks at least 30 feet from any structure, with 10 feet of clearance around them

Zone 3: The Extended Zone (30–100+ feet)

The goal here is to reduce the intensity of any approaching fire so that what reaches Zone 2 is something that landscaping and the structure can survive:

- Thin dense undergrowth
- Remove dead and dying trees

- Reduce surface fuels — leaf litter, fallen branches, deadfall
- Maintain healthy spacing between tree groups

This zone is where larger-scale community work — chipping days, brush clearing parties, partnering with the ashram's land management — produces the most return.

A note for ashram and community land

Yogaville's acreage includes meaningful stretches of forested land that act as both a beautiful spiritual setting and a fuel bed. Defensible space work in Zone 3 should be sensitive to:

- The contemplative character of the land
- Ecological values (hardwood diversity, wildlife habitat)
- The James River corridor and any riparian buffers
- Existing trails and meditation paths

Done well, defensible space work can enhance the land's health — removing invasive species, improving understory diversity, reducing fire intensity — while also reducing risk. It is a thinning, not a clearing. The Virginia Department of Forestry offers free technical assistance to landowners interested in this kind of work.

19. Smoke Alarms and Carbon Monoxide Detectors

Smoke alarms

- Install smoke alarms in every bedroom, outside every sleeping area, and on every level of the home (including basements).
- Test every month. Pressing and holding the test button until the alarm sounds is sufficient.
- Replace batteries at least once a year (consider replacing on a date you remember — daylight savings time, birthday, or the same week as a community drill).
- Replace the entire unit every 10 years. The detection sensor degrades regardless of how the alarm has been used.
- Sealed 10-year lithium-battery alarms are the easiest option for households that don't want to change batteries; they cost \$20–25 and last the full service life.
- Interconnected alarms — wired or wireless — are best for larger homes: when one sounds, all sound.
- Use photoelectric alarms (or dual-sensor) — better at detecting smoldering fires, which is what kills most people. Ionization-only alarms are more prone to false alarms from cooking.

Carbon monoxide detectors

- Required if you have any combustion appliances (gas range, gas water heater, gas furnace, wood stove, fireplace, attached garage).
- Install on every level of the home and near sleeping areas.
- Test monthly; replace per manufacturer (typically 5–10 years).

- Combined smoke+CO alarms exist and are a reasonable choice in many homes.

20. Fire Extinguishers

Types

Class	For	Examples
A	Ordinary combustibles	Wood, paper, cloth, trash
B	Flammable liquids	Gasoline, oil, grease, paint
C	Energized electrical	Wiring, motors, appliances
D	Combustible metals	Lab/industrial use; rare in homes
K	Cooking media	Commercial kitchen fryer fires
ABC	Multipurpose	The standard home/office choice

For Yogaville residences, an ABC dry-chemical extinguisher rated 2-A:10-B:C or larger is the appropriate choice. For the dining hall and any commercial kitchen, a K-class extinguisher is required in addition to ABC.

Placement

- At least one on every level of the home
- Within easy reach of the kitchen but not directly above the stove (you don't want to reach into the fire to grab the extinguisher)
- Near (but not inside) the garage
- In any room with a wood stove or fireplace
- In every vehicle stored on the property (small 1-lb units work)

The PASS technique

Every adult in the household should know it cold:

10. P – Pull the pin.
11. A – Aim low, at the base of the fire.
12. S – Squeeze the handle slowly and evenly.
13. S – Sweep the nozzle from side to side, advancing as the fire diminishes.

When to fight, when to flee

The honest answer for most household fires is: leave first, fight second. The criteria for attempting to fight a fire with a portable extinguisher are narrow:

- The fire is small (no larger than a wastebasket)

- It is contained and not spreading
- Everyone else is already out of the building
- You have a clear, unobstructed escape route behind you
- The room is not filling with smoke
- You have already called 911 (or are about to immediately)

If any of these is in doubt, leave the building, close the door behind you, get to your meeting place, and call 911 from outside. A house can be rebuilt. You cannot.

Maintenance

- Check the pressure gauge monthly (needle in the green)
- Inspect the pin and tamper seal
- Shake or tap dry-chemical extinguishers occasionally to keep the powder from compacting
- Have them professionally serviced every 6 years (or per manufacturer)
- Replace per manufacturer guidance (typically 12 years for standard ABC)

21. Home Escape Plans

Every household should have a written, drawn home escape plan that has been walked through with everyone who lives in the home. The plan does not need to be elaborate. It needs to be done.

Components of a working home escape plan

- A simple floor plan with every room labeled
- Two ways out of every room — door and window are the typical pair; for second-story rooms, this means knowing how to reach the ground (escape ladder, low-roof drop, etc.)
- A designated meeting place outside the home — visible, fixed, far enough from the structure to be safe (e.g., the mailbox, a specific tree, a specific neighbor's driveway)
- A plan for who calls 911 (from outside the building, after everyone is out)
- A plan for pets and animals
- A plan for any household members who may need assistance

Practicing

Walk the plan twice a year — minimum once during the day, once at night. Time it. The first time, take as long as it takes. Then try to do it in under two minutes.

Once you're out

- Stay out. Never go back into a burning building for any reason.
- Call 911 from outside (108 Yogaville Way; nearest cross street; description of the fire; whether anyone is unaccounted for)
- Wait at the meeting place. If a member is missing, tell responders when they arrive.

22. Top Home Fire Causes — and What to Do

Cooking (#1 cause of home fires nationally)

- Stay in the kitchen when you are frying, grilling, or broiling. Most kitchen fires start when the cook leaves the room.
- Keep flammables away from the stove — pot holders, paper towels, curtains, kitchen scraps.
- Smother a small pan fire with a lid; turn off the heat. Never use water on a grease fire. Never carry a burning pan.
- If a kitchen fire begins to grow, get everyone out, close the door behind you, and call 911 from outside.

Heating (#2 cause of home fires in winter)

- Keep all heaters at least 3 feet away from anything combustible.
- Have wood stoves and chimneys inspected and cleaned annually.
- Never leave a portable heater unattended. Turn it off when you leave the room or sleep.
- Use only the fuel for which a heater is designed.

Electrical

- Replace any damaged cord. Do not run cords under rugs.
- Don't overload outlets or power strips. Major appliances should have their own dedicated outlets.
- If a circuit breaker trips repeatedly, find out why — don't just keep resetting.
- Older homes (pre-1970) may have wiring that warrants professional inspection.

Smoking

- Smoke outside. Always. Indoor smoking is responsible for a disproportionate share of fatal home fires.
- Use a deep, sturdy ashtray. Douse butts in water before discarding.
- Never smoke in bed. Never smoke when drowsy or under the influence.

Candles, incense, ritual fires

- Never leave a candle, incense stick, or ritual flame unattended.
- Keep them at least 12 inches from anything combustible.
- Use stable, non-tip holders. Set them on heat-resistant surfaces.
- Especially in a community where flame is part of practice: the same care that goes into the lighting goes into the extinguishing.

Garage, workshop, and storage

- Store gasoline, paint thinners, and other flammables in a detached shed if possible — not the basement.

- Keep tools and rags soaked in oil or solvent in metal containers with tight lids — they can spontaneously combust.
- Don't accumulate junk and combustibles in a way that blocks escape routes or creates a fuel pile.

Part VIII — Evacuation and Sheltering

23. When to Evacuate

Evacuation is a decision that should be made earlier rather than later. In any active fire scenario, the cost of leaving when you turn out not to have needed to is a few hours of inconvenience; the cost of not leaving when you should have is potentially catastrophic. The default in the face of credible threat should be to go.

Triggers to evacuate immediately

- Buckingham County or the Virginia Department of Emergency Management issues a mandatory evacuation order for your area
- Visible flames or heavy smoke within sight of your home
- Embers landing on or near your property
- A fire is reported within 1 mile and the wind is blowing toward you
- Fire department or law enforcement comes to your door and tells you to leave
- You are simply uncertain and the conditions are bad — your gut is data

Triggers to prepare to evacuate

- Red flag warning combined with an active fire anywhere in central Virginia
- Power outage of unknown duration in extreme weather
- Reports of fire on the property or in the immediate vicinity
- Voluntary evacuation advisory issued by the county

If you choose to stay (shelter in place)

In some Virginia wildfire scenarios, sheltering inside a closed, well-defended home is actually safer than driving through smoke and flame on a narrow rural road. This is not the default; it is the exception. If you find yourself in this scenario:

- Close all windows, doors, and vents
- Remove combustible items (curtains, papers) from near windows
- Fill sinks and tubs with water
- Wear long sleeves, long pants, sturdy shoes, an N95 if you have one
- Stay together; stay in an interior room
- Have communication: phone, radio, NOAA weather radio
- Listen for any change in conditions. Be ready to evacuate quickly if circumstances worsen

24. Evacuation Routes Out of Yogaville

Yogaville's primary access is via Yogaville Way, which connects to State Route 604 (River Road) and from there to Route 20 (a north-south corridor between Scottsville and Dillwyn). Route 20 connects north to

U.S. 250 toward Charlottesville and south toward Dillwyn and U.S. 60. Understanding the routes and their alternatives is part of any household's preparedness.

Primary evacuation routes

- Northbound: Yogaville Way → Rt 604 → Rt 20 north → Scottsville (Albemarle County). From Scottsville, options open to U.S. 250 (toward Charlottesville) or to Rt 6 (toward Fluvanna).
- Southbound: Yogaville Way → Rt 604 → Rt 20 south → Dillwyn. From Dillwyn, options open to U.S. 15, U.S. 60, and points further south.
- Eastbound: via Rt 604 east → Rt 56 or Rt 633 toward Buckingham courthouse area or Arvonnia. Multiple connecting roads.

Considerations

- In any major incident, Yogaville Way itself could be blocked — by fire, by downed trees, by emergency apparatus staging. Have a backup mental route.
- Crossing the James River requires either the Hatton Ferry or the bridges at Scottsville (Rt 20) or further afield. The ferry is seasonal and limited in capacity.
- Traffic is rarely an issue on these rural roads under normal circumstances. In a regional evacuation, it could be.
- Have a paper map of central Virginia in every vehicle. GPS depends on cell signal and battery.

Pre-identified rally points

Households should agree in advance on at least one rally point outside the immediate area. Suggested options for the community to discuss:

- Scottsville Community Center or the Scottsville town park (north)
- Buckingham County administration area near Dillwyn (south)
- A specific friend or family member's home in Charlottesville, Lynchburg, or Richmond

Knowing where you are going is half the work. The other half is having a way to tell people you got there.

25. The Go-Bag

A go-bag is a small bag, kept by the door (or in the car), with the things you would need if you had to leave the house in 60 seconds with no notice. The full version of the go-bag checklist appears in Part X as a handout; the essentials:

- Photo ID, driver's license, passport (or copies)
- Insurance cards and at least one copy of homeowner's/renter's insurance policy info
- A list of essential phone numbers (family, doctor, vet, insurance)
- Prescription medications for at least one week (rotate stock so they don't expire)
- A change of clothes; sturdy shoes; layers
- Water (at least 1 liter per person) and non-perishable food (energy bars)

- Flashlight and headlamp; extra batteries
- Phone charger and a small portable battery pack
- Cash in small bills
- Basic first aid kit
- N95 masks (for smoke)
- A copy of your home escape plan and emergency contact card
- Pet supplies if applicable (leash, carrier, food, vaccination records)
- Spiritual items as appropriate — mala, photograph of guru, small text — these matter

26. Special Populations

Elderly and mobility-limited residents

The Special Populations Liaison should maintain a confidential roster — kept by no more than two people — of community members who may need help in an evacuation. For each such resident:

- Two pre-identified neighbors who will check on them and assist with evacuation if needed
- Notes on mobility (stairs, wheelchair, walker, oxygen)
- Medication needs that might require additional time to gather
- Transportation needs (do they have a vehicle? a driver?)
- Pets that would accompany them

This roster should be reviewed at least twice a year. It should not be distributed broadly. It should be quietly competent — the kind of mutual care that does its work without drawing attention to itself.

Residential program participants

Yogaville hosts residential programs whose participants may be in retreat, may be silent, may have limited cell coverage, and may not register external alerts as urgent. The ashram has formal responsibility for these guests during their programs. Specific considerations:

- On arrival, every program participant should be briefed on: the location of fire exits in their building; the meeting place outside in case of evacuation; how Yogaville will alert them (bells, in-person)
- Long-term retreatants should have a designated check-in person who knows where they are and can physically reach them
- Program leaders should have a roster of participants and a check-out protocol for any evacuation
- The ashram should designate a senior leader as the program-evacuation coordinator for any incident

Children

Where children are present:

- Practice the home escape plan with them; let them participate in drawing it

- Teach them to call 911 from a safe location
- Teach Stop-Drop-and-Roll if their clothing catches fire
- Teach them to crawl low under smoke
- Teach them never to hide in a fire — under beds, in closets — they should leave
- Teach them not to go back inside for toys or pets — that is what firefighters are for

Pets and animals

- Have a carrier ready for cats and small dogs; pre-pack a small pet go-bag
- Keep a leash and recent photo of each pet
- Have copies of vaccination records (some shelters require them)
- Identify a pet-friendly evacuation destination in advance — many hotels are pet-friendly with notice
- For chickens, goats, or other outdoor animals: cover the basics in your plan even if a full evacuation isn't feasible (water, shelter from smoke, plan for return)

Part IX — Wildfire-Specific Considerations

27. Embers, Spotting, and Why Most Homes Burn

The defining feature of modern wildfire structure loss is the ember. When wildfire research first began to systematically study why homes burn in WUI fires, the surprising finding was that the great majority of structure ignitions are not from direct flame contact with the building. They are from windborne embers — burning fragments of wood and vegetation that can travel a half mile or more — landing in receptive locations on or near a home.

Where embers find homes

- On the roof, especially in valleys where they collect
- In gutters full of dry leaves
- Through unscreened soffit vents and attic vents
- Beneath decks and porches with combustible material stored underneath
- In firewood piles stacked against the house
- In dry mulch and vegetation within 5 feet of siding
- On combustible doormats and patio furniture
- Through open windows or doors

Hardening the home against embers

The good news: ember-resistance is achievable through a series of relatively small, low-cost interventions, almost all of which are part of routine maintenance:

- Clean roof and gutters of leaves and pine needles
- Install 1/8-inch metal mesh screens on all vents (soffit, attic, foundation, dryer)
- Clear combustibles within 5 feet of the building (Zone 1 work)
- Move firewood at least 30 feet from the house
- Enclose the underside of decks where possible, or keep the area beneath them swept and clear
- Use non-combustible doormats and patio furniture covers on red-flag days
- Replace combustible (wood, vinyl) gutters with metal where possible
- On extreme-fire-danger days, close all windows even if cooler air is moving

None of these interventions requires a contractor or significant capital. All can be done in a weekend by a homeowner, or by a community workday with shared tools and shared time.

28. Air Quality and Smoke

Even when fire does not approach the property, smoke from regional fires can substantially degrade air quality for hours or days at a time. Central Virginia experienced this in November 2023 during the Matts

Creek and Quaker Run fires, and again with smoke from Canadian wildfires in 2023. As fire seasons grow longer and more intense regionally, smoke days are becoming a more frequent feature of life.

Health considerations

- Fine particulate matter (PM2.5) in wildfire smoke is associated with cardiovascular and respiratory effects, especially in sensitive populations: children, elderly, pregnant people, those with asthma, COPD, or heart disease
- AQI (Air Quality Index) above 100 is unhealthy for sensitive groups; above 150 unhealthy for everyone; above 200 very unhealthy; above 300 hazardous
- Visible smoke or smell of smoke indoors during an incident indicates air infiltration that should be addressed

Sheltering in smoke

- Close windows and doors; close fireplace dampers
- Run an air conditioner on recirculate (not fresh air) if available
- Use a portable HEPA air purifier in a primary living space if you have one
- A DIY box-fan-with-MERV-13-filter air purifier (the “Corsi-Rosenthal box”) is cheap and effective; instructions are widely available
- N95 masks are protective outdoors during smoke events; surgical and cloth masks are not
- Limit outdoor activity, especially exertion, during AQI events

Monitoring

- AirNow.gov — official EPA air quality monitoring
- PurpleAir.com — community-deployed real-time monitors
- Smoke forecast: NOAA HRRR-Smoke (search for the model output)
- Local NWS office at Wakefield issues smoke advisories when warranted

29. Post-Fire Considerations

If a fire damages or threatens the property, the work does not end when the flames are out. The community should have at minimum a sketch of a post-incident protocol:

- Account for everyone before anything else
- Do not re-enter damaged structures until cleared by fire department personnel
- Document damage with photographs before any cleanup, for insurance purposes
- Contact insurance carriers promptly; many will dispatch adjusters within hours for major losses
- Be careful of ash — it can contain irritants and pathogens; wear gloves, N95, sturdy shoes
- Reach out to the Buckingham County Department of Emergency Services for guidance on disaster assistance
- Check for hot spots in the days following — fires can rekindle, especially in duff and root systems, days or weeks after the apparent flame is out

Emotional and spiritual recovery from an incident — even one that did not result in significant material loss — is its own work. The same community that prepared together is the community that recovers together. Plan for it.

Part X — Handouts

This section contains ready-to-print handouts for use at the meeting and for ongoing distribution. Each is designed to fit on a single page or two. Pull them out, print as needed, and offer at the meeting's resource table or in follow-up community emails.

HANDOUT A: One-Page Home Fire Safety Checklist

Yogaville Home Fire Safety — Quick Checklist

Test once. Tick once. Hang on the refrigerator. Repeat seasonally.

Smoke alarms and CO detectors

- ☐ One smoke alarm in every bedroom
- ☐ One outside each sleeping area
- ☐ One on every level of the home
- ☐ All tested in the last 30 days
- ☐ Batteries replaced in the last 12 months (or sealed 10-yr units)
- ☐ No alarm in the home is older than 10 years
- ☐ At least one CO detector if any combustion appliance present

Fire extinguishers

- ☐ One ABC-rated extinguisher on every level
- ☐ One near the kitchen, not above the stove
- ☐ Pressure gauge in green; pin and seal intact
- ☐ All adults know PASS (Pull, Aim, Squeeze, Sweep)

Defensible space (Zone 1: 0–5 feet)

- ☐ Gutters and roof clear of leaves and debris
- ☐ Nothing combustible touching siding
- ☐ Firewood and lumber moved 30+ feet from the house
- ☐ Combustible mulch within 5 feet of foundation removed or replaced with gravel
- ☐ Vents screened with 1/8-inch metal mesh
- ☐ Under-deck area clear of stored combustibles

Home escape plan

- ☐ Drawn floor plan with two ways out of every room
- ☐ Outdoor meeting place agreed on
- ☐ Walked through by everyone in the household in the last 6 months

- ☐ Plan for pets included
- ☐ Plan for anyone needing assistance included

Preparedness

- ☐ Signed up for Buckingham County emergency alerts
- ☐ Phone tree contact info up to date
- ☐ Go-bag packed and accessible
- ☐ House number visible from the road
- ☐ Out-of-area contact designated and informed

HANDOUT B: Home Escape Plan Template

Use a blank piece of paper. Draw your home — roughly is fine. Mark:

14. Every room
15. All doors and windows
16. Two ways out of each bedroom (the primary route and a backup)
17. Smoke alarm locations (★)
18. Fire extinguisher locations (E)
19. Your outdoor meeting place (a mailbox, a tree, a neighbor's driveway)

On the back of the same sheet, write down:

- Everyone's name in the household
- Pets and where they are most likely to be sleeping
- Anyone who needs help — and who is assigned to help them
- Whose job it is to call 911 (from outside, after everyone is out)
- Your out-of-area contact's name and phone number

Walk it. Once during the day, once at night. Time it. Try to beat your time.

HANDOUT C: Go-Bag Checklist

Documents (in a waterproof pouch)

- Driver's license / passport (or copies)
- Insurance cards (health, homeowner's, auto)
- Birth certificates and social security cards (or copies)
- List of essential phone numbers
- Recent photographs of household members (in case of separation)

Medical

- Prescription medications for at least a week

- Eyeglasses, hearing aids, dentures
- List of medical conditions and current medications
- Basic first aid kit
- N95 masks (smoke)

Clothing and shelter

- Change of clothes; sturdy shoes; layers
- Rain gear
- Hat
- Lightweight blanket or emergency mylar blanket

Food and water

- 1 liter of water per person
- Energy bars or other non-perishable food
- Hand sanitizer

Tools and power

- Flashlight and headlamp
- Extra batteries
- Phone charger and portable battery pack
- Multi-tool or small folding knife
- Whistle
- Battery-powered or hand-crank NOAA radio (one per household; not necessarily in the bag)

Money

- Cash in small bills (\$100–200 if possible)
- Coins for parking, vending, payphones

Pets

- Leash and harness
- Collapsible bowl
- Food for at least 3 days
- Vaccination records
- Carrier for cats and small dogs

Personal/spiritual

- Mala or prayer beads
- Small photograph or text that matters to you
- Notebook and pen

Rotate medications and food annually so nothing in the bag has expired. Keep it in a known place — by the door, in a hall closet, or in the vehicle if you can spare the space.

HANDOUT D: Family Communication Card

Print one per person in the household. Wallet-sized if you can. The information that matters when phones are dead or someone is separated.

Yogaville Emergency Contact Card

My name: _____

Home address: 108 Yogaville Way / _____

My phone: _____

Household members & phones: _____

Outdoor meeting place: _____

Out-of-area contact: _____ — phone: _____

Phone-tree captain: _____ — phone: _____

Buckingham County Emergency Services: 434-969-1772

Glenmore Fire Department: 434-969-2317

In any emergency: 911

HANDOUT E: Phone Tree Sign-Up Form

To be filled out at the meeting. Collect and consolidate into a master spreadsheet by the Phone Tree Convener within 7 days.

Field	Your answer
Full name	
Household address / location	
Primary phone number	
Backup phone (if any)	
Email	
Cluster (ashram core / The Way / river-side / outer / other)	
Willing to be a primary cluster captain?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Maybe
Willing to be a backup cluster captain?	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Maybe

Field	Your answer
Preferred contact method for alerts	☐ Phone call ☐ Text ☐ Either
Other household members to include	
Any special considerations (mobility, language, etc.)	

HANDOUT F: Volunteer Interest Card

Mark any role(s) you would consider taking on. The Fire Safety Committee Convener will follow up within 7 days to talk through what each role would actually look like for you.

- ☐ Fire Safety Committee Convener
- ☐ Phone Tree Convener
- ☐ Cluster Captain (which cluster: _____)
- ☐ Defensible Space Coordinator
- ☐ Home Safety Check Coordinator
- ☐ Smoke Alarm and Battery Distributor
- ☐ Training & Drill Coordinator
- ☐ Special Populations Liaison
- ☐ Resource Tracker
- ☐ Communications/Newsletter Contributor
- ☐ After-Action and Documentation Lead
- ☐ Fire Department Liaison
- ☐ I want to help but don't know how yet — please get in touch

Name: _____ Phone: _____ Email: _____

HANDOUT G: Buckingham County Emergency Contact Sheet

Contact	Number / Detail
Any actual emergency	911
Buckingham County Emergency Services (admin)	434-969-1772
Glenmore Fire Department	434-969-2317
Dillwyn / Buckingham VFD (admin)	434-983-3484
Scottsville Volunteer Fire Department	434-286-2841

Contact	Number / Detail
Cody Davis, Chief, Buckingham Emergency Services	434-969-7734 / cdavis@buckinghamcounty.virginia.gov
Charles Kirby, Emergency Management Coordinator	434-969-4242 / ckirby@buckinghamcounty.virginia.gov
Virginia Department of Forestry (general)	dof.virginia.gov
Virginia Poison Center	1-800-222-1222
VDOT — Road and traffic conditions	511 (or 511virginia.org)
U.S. Drought Monitor	drought.gov
AirNow (air quality)	airnow.gov
NOAA Weather Radio	162.400–162.550 MHz (depending on location)

HANDOUT H: After-Action Survey (Post-Meeting)

Email or hand back to Erik or Galen within a week. Five minutes.

20. What part of the meeting was most useful to you?
21. What would you have liked more time on?
22. What was unclear or missing?
23. What concrete action will you take in the next 7 days?
24. Are there topics you'd like the next community meeting to cover? (winter heating safety, wildfire-specific drills, CO/CO₂ safety, severe storms, generator safety, water-supply preparedness)
25. Would you be interested in a hands-on fire extinguisher training in the next 90 days?
26. Other comments, observations, or offers of help:

Part XI — After the Meeting

30. The Follow-up Plan

Within 7 days (May 17–24)

- Galen and Erik draft and send the post-meeting summary email to the VSA list. Include: a brief narrative of what happened; the full list of commitments made; the names of the Fire Safety Committee and the cluster captains; the date and location of the first committee meeting; the date of the first phone-tree test; links to all handouts; a follow-up survey link
- Phone Tree Convener consolidates the sign-up sheets into a master spreadsheet
- Committee Convener follows up individually with every person who checked a volunteer-interest box
- Erik posts a brief summary to epn108.substack.com if appropriate
- Photographs from the meeting (with permission) shared via the community email list

Within 14 days (by May 31)

- First Fire Safety Committee meeting
- Committee adopts: a roster, a regular meeting time, a working communications channel (email or shared document), and a 60-day work plan
- Outreach to Glenmore VFD and Buckingham Emergency Services to invite a walkthrough
- WhatsApp/Signal Yogaville Fire Safety group established

Within 30 days (by June 16)

- First phone-tree test
- After-action note for the test circulated
- 100% of attendees signed up for Buckingham County alerts (verified by check-in)
- Initial inventory of ashram smoke alarms and fire extinguishers complete
- Date set for the community Defensible Space Workday and fire-extinguisher training session

Within 60 days (by July 16)

- Walkthrough of the ashram with Glenmore VFD or Buckingham Emergency Services completed
- Yogaville Site Map for emergency responders drafted and shared with the local departments
- Special Populations roster established (confidential, two-keeper)
- Defensible Space Workday held
- Mid-summer follow-up community meeting scheduled for September or October

Within 90 days (by August 15)

- Community evacuation drill conducted
- Fire extinguisher training session held
- Second phone-tree test

- Initial draft of a written Community Emergency Preparedness Plan
- Fall fire-season preparedness checklist distributed to all households

Ongoing rhythm

- Monthly Fire Safety Committee meetings
- Semi-annual community meetings (spring and fall)
- Semi-annual phone-tree tests (first Saturday of May and October)
- Annual review of the Community Emergency Preparedness Plan
- Seasonal newsletter contributions to the VSA list

31. What Success Looks Like

Twelve months from May 17, 2026, what would a successful community look like? Some markers:

- Every household has tested smoke alarms, an accessible fire extinguisher, a written home escape plan, and a go-bag
- Every household is signed up for Buckingham County emergency alerts
- A working phone tree has been tested four times in the past year, with after-action documentation
- A Fire Safety Committee meets monthly, with rotating leadership and a stable core
- Glenmore VFD personnel know the property well, have a current site map, and have been on the grounds at least once
- The 0–5 foot Zone 1 around every dwelling is in good order
- Two community-wide workdays and at least one fire extinguisher training have happened
- A written Community Emergency Preparedness Plan exists and is reviewed annually
- The community knows itself better — neighbors know neighbors; the elderly and the new are connected; the practice of mutual care has deepened

The last marker is in some ways the most important. Preparedness work, like spiritual practice, is at its best when it is also relationship work. The phone tree is also a phone tree of human connection. The defensible space workday is also a workday of friendship. The smoke alarm exchange is also an exchange of trust.

In the tradition Yogaville carries, fire is not only a threat. It is Agni — the principle of transformation, the bridge between offerings and the divine, the warmth at the center of the home. Caring for fire is part of how we keep the household sacred.

May this work be a small contribution to that larger care. May the community be safe. May the land be safe. May all beings be safe.

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti.

Appendix A — Glossary of Fire Safety Terms

A working glossary for cross-referencing terms used throughout this memo.

Term	Meaning
AQI (Air Quality Index)	Standardized 0–500+ scale for reporting air quality. Above 100 begins to affect sensitive groups.
CodeRED	A widely used emergency notification platform contracted by many Virginia localities to push alerts via call, text, and email.
CO (Carbon Monoxide)	Colorless, odorless gas produced by incomplete combustion. CO detectors are essential where any combustion appliance is present.
Crown fire	Fire moving through the canopy of trees rather than along the surface. Much more intense; far harder to suppress.
Defensible Space	The maintained area around a structure designed to slow or stop the spread of wildfire.
DOF	Virginia Department of Forestry, the state’s primary wildfire suppression agency.
Ember	A burning fragment of vegetation that can be carried by wind. The leading cause of structure ignition in WUI fires.
Firewise USA	A national community-based wildfire preparedness program administered by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA).
HIZ (Home Ignition Zone)	The 0–100+ foot area around a structure, divided into zones with different defensive-space priorities.
KBDI (Keetch-Byram Drought Index)	Soil-moisture-based index used to estimate fire severity potential. 0 = saturated; 800 = desert-like.
Mutual Aid	Formal agreements among neighboring fire departments to share resources in larger or more complex incidents.
NFPA	National Fire Protection Association; promulgates the codes and standards used widely in U.S. fire safety.
NIFC	National Interagency Fire Center, the federal coordinating body for wildfire response.
NWS	National Weather Service. Issues red flag warnings, fire weather forecasts, and routine forecasts.
PASS	Mnemonic for using a fire extinguisher: Pull, Aim, Squeeze, Sweep.

Term	Meaning
Piedmont	The rolling-hills region of central Virginia between the Blue Ridge and the Coastal Plain. Yogaville sits in the Piedmont.
PM2.5	Particulate matter 2.5 microns or smaller; the most health-relevant pollutant in wildfire smoke.
Readiness Class (1–5)	VA DOF daily fire-danger classification. Class 5 corresponds to extreme red-flag conditions.
Red Flag Warning	NWS forecast that combines low humidity, high winds, and dry fuels — conditions in which fires spread rapidly.
Shelter in Place	Remaining within a closed structure rather than evacuating — used when evacuation routes are more dangerous than the structure.
Spot fire / Spotting	A new fire ignited by windborne embers, often ahead of the main fire.
Surface fire	Fire burning along the ground in litter, grass, and low vegetation. The most common Virginia wildfire behavior.
VDEM	Virginia Department of Emergency Management.
VFD	Volunteer Fire Department. The primary structure-fire response model in most of rural Virginia.
WEA	Wireless Emergency Alerts. Federally pushed alerts to all cell phones in an affected area. No sign-up needed.
WUI	Wildland-Urban Interface. The zone where developed land abuts undeveloped vegetated land. Yogaville is a WUI community.

Appendix B — Resources and Further Reading

Federal and state agencies

- Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF): dof.virginia.gov — daily fire-danger ratings, prescribed-fire information, technical assistance
- Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM): vaemergency.gov
- Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) — Drought Monitoring: deq.virginia.gov/water/water-quantity/drought
- U.S. Drought Monitor: drought.gov
- National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC): nifc.gov
- National Weather Service Wakefield (Hampton Roads/Central VA forecast office): weather.gov/akq
- National Weather Service Sterling (Northern/Western VA): weather.gov/lwx
- FEMA — Ready.gov: ready.gov
- AirNow (air quality): airnow.gov

County and local

- Buckingham County government: buckinghamcountyva.org
- Buckingham County Emergency Services: buckinghamcountyva.org/services/emergency_services/
- Buckingham County Department of Emergency Services on Facebook
- Glenmore Fire Department (Buckingham VFD)
- Dillwyn Volunteer Fire Department
- Scottsville Volunteer Fire Department

Standards and educational organizations

- National Fire Protection Association (NFPA): nfpa.org — free checklists, codes, public-education materials
- Firewise USA: nfpa.org/firewise — voluntary national program for community wildfire preparedness
- American Red Cross: redcross.org — emergency preparedness resources, free preparedness apps
- U.S. Fire Administration: usfa.fema.gov — public education materials
- Ready.gov/wildfires: ready.gov/wildfires
- California's Wildfire Resilience Code (Chapter 7A) — the most rigorous U.S. ember-resistant construction standard; useful reference even outside California

Books and reports worth knowing

- Stephen J. Pyne, *Fire in America: A Cultural History of Wildland and Rural Fire* (Univ. of Washington Press) — foundational text on the U.S. relationship with fire
- Pyne, *To the Last Smoke* — multi-volume regional fire history; the East is its own world
- Jack Cohen et al., research on the Home Ignition Zone — available through the U.S. Forest Service
- Daniel Sumner et al., *Wildfire-Risk Reduction in California's WUI* — applicable principles, even outside California
- NFPA 1144 (Standard for Reducing Structure Ignition Hazards from Wildland Fire)
- NFPA 1700 (Guide for Structural Fire Fighting)

Source notes for this memo

- U.S. Drought Monitor (May 12, 2026 release) for Buckingham/Nelson D3 classification
- Virginia DEQ drought advisory (May 14, 2026)
- CBS19 News reporting (May 14, 2026) on the expansion of extreme drought conditions
- Virginia Mercury (May 2026) on statewide severe drought
- WDBJ7 / Virginia DOF announcement (Feb 12, 2026) on the spring burning law
- Farmville Herald (April 2026) on the Buckingham County burn ban
- Wildfire Explorer (April 28, 2026) on Virginia statewide fire activity and the Frog Hollow Fire
- Roanoke Times, Cardinal News, Daily Progress, and Virginia Mercury coverage (November 2023) of the Matts Creek and Quaker Run Fires
- Buckingham County Emergency Services public information
- National Fire Protection Association public materials

Appendix C — A Note on the Inner Dimension

This is a yogic community, and the work of fire safety planning sits naturally within a larger contemplative life. A few brief observations, in case they are useful.

Fear is not the same as preparation. Fear constricts; preparation expands. The person who has tested their smoke alarm, drawn their escape plan, and packed their go-bag is less anxious about fire, not more. This is the same principle as in any practice: clarity replaces fog; specificity replaces dread.

Equanimity is not detachment from outcome. The Bhagavad Gītā's teaching on samattvam — evenness of mind — is not the teaching of not caring. It is the teaching of caring without being deformed by the caring. We can love this land, love our practice, love our neighbors, love the LOTUS — and prepare seriously for the possibility of fire — and hold all of it without being destabilized by any part of it. That is the practice.

Agni is one of the oldest objects of Hindu reverence — the fire that carries our offerings to the gods, the warmth at the household hearth, the principle of transformation in the body and the mind. We do not propitiate Agni by ignoring fire. We honor Agni by relating to fire with skill — by knowing where it should be, how it should burn, and what should not be in its path. Defensible space is, in this sense, an offering.

Seva — selfless service — is the principle on which a community like Yogaville is built. The volunteer who calls their neighbors at 3:00 AM is doing seva. The captain who walks down the road to check on the elder living alone is doing seva. The person who clears the leaves from the gutter of the dining hall is doing seva. None of this requires being recognized for it. It is its own reward.

Finally: the work of preparing together is not a separate task from the work of being a sangha together. The shared meeting on Sunday morning, the shared coffee at the resource table, the shared phone call, the shared workday — these are sangha. The fire that may or may not come is a possibility. The community is the reality. Tending the community is the work that matters in either case.

May this gathering, on this morning of May 17, 2026, be one of many gatherings. May our preparation be a form of love. May this land, and all who live on it, be safe.

— Erik and Galen

Yogaville, May 2026