

This is an important message from Union County Emergency Services and your local fire departments.



Union County Emergency Services recently reviewed tax records and sent letters to landowners who owned parcels that a preliminary review indicated did not have fire protection on all or part of the property. If you received one of these letters, the text is also included here to allow easier access to web links.

What this means:

Fire protection can be simplified as an agency having the responsibility to respond to a fire. If a property has no fire protection, fire departments have no responsibility to respond to a fire and it is the *landowner's liability and responsibility to suppress any fires, structure or wildland*. Unprotected landowners may also be financially liable for any fires that start on their property and damage neighboring parcels regardless of cause. Outside of city limits in Union County, a property must be within either an Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) protection district or a rural fire protection district (RFPD) to have wildland fire protection, and for structure fire protection a property must be included in an RFPD. RFPD annexation boundaries are pre-defined and properties without fire protection may be annexed into the appropriate RFPD at the landowner's request.

The specific property you own without fire protection has Reference Number(s) (**Reference Numbers**) and can be searched at: <https://union-county.org/assessor-tax-collector/record-search/>.

To verify fire protection:

To verify if you have fire protection on a given parcel, you can look up your property at the URL above and note if the map code listed under "property information" is associated with a municipality or an RFPD in the code table located at: <https://union-county.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Summary-Sheet-2021.pdf>. To verify ODF coverage, see if "fire patrol" is listed under "property tax information" in the Union County Property Information return. (Note that it is possible for only a portion of a taxlot to have ODF protection.)

To obtain fire protection for your property:

To obtain protection for the specific parcel(s) mentioned above, complete the following steps *for each tax lot*:

- Submit a petition for annexation signed by all property owners, a map of the property, legal description of the perimeter (can often be found on the ownership deed, available from the Union County Clerk's office) and a signed Application for Fire Protection to (**applicable RFPD listed here in letter**).
- Receive back from the RFPD the petition, approved application, map, legal description, and a support letter (stating they are willing and able to provide fire protection), and submit all of these documents to the Union County Planning Department, 1001 4th Street Suite C, La Grande, OR 97850.
- There is an \$80.00 fee associated with the annexation procedure for one parcel, with an additional \$40 fee for each additional parcel (up to 5 parcels per application). Discounts can be applied for neighbors who submit applications simultaneously.
- When you submit your application, the Union County Planning Dept. will process the application and submit it to the Union County Board of Commissioners and OR Dept. of Revenue for approval and processing.

If you have questions, contact Union County Emergency Services at em@union-county.org or 541-963-1009

FAQs:

Q: What happens if I call 911 when there is a fire on my unprotected land?

A: A fire department will not be dispatched if your land is listed as unprotected. Fire departments/districts will be notified of the situation and have the discretion to respond at the expense of the landowner. Each agency's decision to respond will be made based on many factors that may vary by jurisdiction, including if the fire is threatening land they protect or how responding to a given fire may impact their ability to cover other calls for service.

Q: Has anything changed in regards to fire protection coverage and am I receiving this letter as the result of any new rules or legislation?

A: No. There have been no recent changes made to fire protection by any agencies in Union County. This letter is being sent as a public service to notify potentially affected landowners who may not be aware of their lack of fire protection to reduce their risk of loss or hardship due to fire.

Q: My property is all cropland or range with no structures and I have my own water trucks and employees. Is there a reason I'd still want fire protection?

A: By Oregon OSHA rules, an employer may not direct their employees to fight a fire unless they have been trained to do so and are provided appropriate safety equipment. Having fire protection coverage will minimize risks of incurring an OSHA violation by directing employees into dangerous situations if a fire does start.

Q: How does fire protection impact my insurance?

A: Due to large wildland fires in recent years many insurance companies are reviewing policies and taking efforts to reduce their risk. You should contact your insurance agent to ask about discounts you may be eligible for by obtaining fire protection, and also if a lack of fire protection could result in a homeowner's or crop insurance claim being denied or a policy cancelled.

Q: Can I choose which RFPD I annex into?

A: No. To prevent fragmented and intermingled fire protection jurisdictional boundaries, Union County Resolution 2022-05 defines which RFPD a given parcel of land may be annexed in to. Letters sent to landowners include the contact information for the relevant RFPD for the specific parcel(s) referenced.

Q: How will I be billed for protection if I annex into a fire district and how much will it cost?

A: With the exception of Medical Springs which is a subscription-based district, all RFPDs in Union County are tax districts, and the rates for fire protection vary by district. The annual cost of fire protection will be reflected in your property tax statement after annexation. The Union County Assessor's Office can provide information on current tax rates for each district, and rates are published at: <https://union-county.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Summary-Sheet-2021.pdf>