

THE KEY TO A SAFER TOMORROW

FIREWISE BULLETIN

SPRING 2014

PAGE 2: **Community Updates cont.**
 PAGE 3: **Mitigation Project in Deer Park, Defensible Space article cont.**
 PAGE 4: **One Less Spark**
 PAGE 5: **Soda Canyon Fire, Success with defenesible space**

NAPA FIREWISE COMMUNITY UPDATES — SPRING 2014

Atlas Peak

The Atlas Peak Fire Safe Council (APFSC) was formed just over three years ago. The community includes residences along two dead end roads: Atlas Peak Road (starting at Westgate intersection) and Old Soda Springs Road. Our accomplishments to date include multiple mitigation projects, emergency right-of-way access for two escape routes, community phone alert system, multiple newsletters, reflective address signage for every residence (70% complete) and annual community meetings hosted by CALFIRE. Atlas Peak has become the second community in Napa County to be recognized by Firewise USA as a “Firewise Community.”

Berryessa Highlands

The Berryessa Highlands Fire Safe Council is in the process of performing a review of its Community Wildfire Protection Plan, since much work has been accomplished over the past three years. Remaining work and maintenance projects need to be re-evaluated regularly, and schedules for the next number of years are under development. To be included in their plans is a project to widen and clear a lakeside hiking trail which has become overgrown.

The Council also hopes to add a number of Fire Safety Bulletin Boards around the community as well as a “Fire Danger – Barometer” sign.

Berryessa Estates

The Berryessa Estates Fire Safe Council is preparing to undertake a new community fire safety risk evaluation in cooperation with a Defensible Space consultant from the Napa Communities Firewise Foundation. Napa Firewise will also assist them in the development of a new Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). This planning will help the community in conducting prioritized mitigation projects over the next three to five years.

Story continues inside on next page

Defensible Space — What’s Next?

by Tom Vreeland, Director, Napa Firewise

Have you created a wide defensible space perimeter around your home? Congratulations! Now it’s time to ask yourself what else you can do to protect your family, and the answer is: fire harden the home itself. This article addresses one crucial aspect of fire hardening, ember incursion. Many homes survive a firestorm sweeping through, only to ignite later, long after the fire has passed, due to embers that have entered the structure. Wind can also carry embers a great distance to ignite structures, even if the actual fire is not near.



3 inch round chemically treated fire stopping vent

Why are vents so important?

Vents are a necessary part of a structure that enable air to circulate in uninhabited areas such as attics and crawl spaces. Unfortunately, vents can also allow embers to enter. Vent cover screens may block insects and pests, but they do not prevent embers from passing through. Embers may build up on a screen, resulting in ashes passing through even very fine mesh screens.

But there are vent covers available which prevent embers from entering. The two typical designs are overlapping baffles (labyrinth) and honeycomb (small tube-like passageways with a chemical that foams at a given temperature). Both designs effectively prevent embers from entering a structure. It should also be noted that a properly installed basement (crawl space) vapor barrier can significantly reduce the number of required foundation vents.

Story continues inside on page 3

NAPA FIREWISE COMMUNITY UPDATES — SPRING 2014

continued from page 1

Circle Oaks

Circle Oaks Fire Safe Council has recently developed a schedule for its 2014 mitigation work, with the assistance and approval of CAL FIRE Battalion Chief Geoff Belyea. Circle Oaks has received \$8,000 in funding from Napa Firewise to do this current work. This year the effort will include three projects to protect the recently upgraded Water District facilities.

Deer Park

See article about Deer Park on page 3 of our Newsletter.

Gordon Valley

Gordon Valley is the newest community in Napa County to empanel a Fire Safe Council with the help of Napa Firewise. The committee has been touring their community and inspecting sites with high fire risk which were defined by the consultant, Carol Rice. The committee has found this "hands-on" method of observing and discussing the various projects with each other and the Gordon Valley Volunteer Fire Department officers extremely helpful...and an eye opener! We will be meeting in early February to begin work on a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) which will prioritize our projects and develop a schedule for mitigation project work.

Mt. Veeder

Because of the nature of their neighborhood, the Mount Veeder Fire Safe Council (MVFSC) has placed particular emphasis on creating shaded fuel breaks along the paths of old ridgeline roads in order to restrict the spread of fire from one watershed into another. In 2014, the group will further extend the Old Ridge Road Shaded Fuel Break, a 3-mile project begun in 2012 that is now about half completed. Mt. Veeder has just won a significant grant from the US Forest Service, which will greatly help this mitigation project.

The MVFSC has also facilitated the installation of almost 200 green reflective address signs by making a bulk purchase and selling them to residents at a reduced price. Fire safety awareness is regularly promoted by the use of a community email list of over 300 names and via NextDoor, a neighborhood internet bulletin board with over 200 Mount Veeder neighborhood members.



Napa County inmates removing hazardous vegetation at the entrance to Deer Park.



Members of the newly formed Gordon Valley Fire Safe Council meet to discuss wildfire planning

Soda Canyon

The Soda Canyon (SC) Firewise Council obtained a generous \$8,000 grant from the Napa Communities Firewise Foundation to finish the work started last year on both Soda Canyon Road and Loma Vista Drive. The work involves clearing brush, trimming up trees, and separating the tree canopy overhangs (tree "tunnels") on both sides of Soda Canyon Road using the CAL FIRE Delta Crew, and the visible results are being enthusiastically supported by members of the community.

In addition, the Council is in the process of setting up the Call-Em-All phone system for emergency phone notifications to residents in the Soda Canyon/Loma Vista area. Next they will begin ordering and installing reflective address signs for our residences that have requested them, to aid fire and other emergency responders to more easily find homes in the area.

The Council is also planning a community-wide meeting for early March to further spread the word about the need to be prepared and what to do, and to facilitate communication among the various residents in the area.

NAPA FIREWISE SPONSORS WILDFIRE MITIGATION PROJECT IN DEER PARK

The Napa Communities Firewise Foundation (Napa Firewise), in collaboration with the Deer Park Fire Department; Deer Park Fire Safe Council; St. Helena Hospital; Napa County Public Works; and CALFIRE/Napa County Fire Department, announced the completion of a roadside vegetation removal project near St. Helena Hospital. The goal of the project was to reduce and remove dangerous fire-prone vegetation along local roadways that have the potential for spreading wildfire.

The work centered around the intersection of Deer Park and Lower Sanitarium Roads, and then continued to Glass Mountain Road. These site locations were selected because they are highly visible and represent an excellent “before and after” demonstration of Firewise vegetation management techniques. Crews from CALFIRE’s Lake County Konocti Fire Camp

performed a majority of the work.

Stephen Gort, Vice President and Treasurer of Napa Firewise, indicated the multi-agency effort in creating a demonstration project has become the essential first step in building community awareness of the importance of wildfire preparedness. “Wave the next time you pass one of our work crews,” says Gort. “They love the recognition!”

The Napa Communities Firewise Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3). It was established in 2005 to provide the citizens of Napa County with community-based fire awareness programs and services that encourage individuals and communities to become involved in their own safety. The Deer Park demonstration project is just one of many services offered by Napa Firewise. For more information, visit www.napafirewise.org, www.facebook.com/napafirewise, or www.twitter.com/napafirewise.

Defensible Space — What’s Next? *continued from page 1*



Foundation Vent

Ember-resistant vents come in a wide variety of types and sizes. Flanges vary for different applications, such as wood siding or stucco. Soffit vents can be round or rectangular, and gable vents can also be different shapes. Vent cover suppliers can help you to select the appropriate product for your structure. It is recommended that you remove a few existing covers to measure a sampling of openings, as sizes or access may vary. It is often difficult to increase a vent opening, and returning product can be a hassle, so measure carefully. One also needs to consider that an ember-resistant vent cover may not have the same ventilation flow as the cover being replaced, meaning that the number of vents may need to be increased.

While you are addressing vent covers, you should also take the time to assess the entire exterior. Seal siding gaps from penetrations, such as for water pipes or electrical conduit, with insulating foam. This not only helps on energy



Eave Vent

conservation, but will keep pests and embers out as well. Seal off and vent any open areas where embers could collect, such as the roof overhangs and crawl space access. Though it appears easy to remove a vent cover and replace it, nothing is as easy as it seems. The skill level required to tackle such a project is advanced. Attempting this kind of project is only recommended for highly skilled weekend warriors or professionals. If you have to think about which end of the hammer to pick up, I suggest that you pick up the phone instead and call a licensed contractor.

There are several fire prevention vent manufacturers mentioned online. Two worth reviewing are Brandguard Vents (baffle type) at brandguardvents.com and Vulcan Fireproof Vents (chemical type) at vulcanvents.com. (Please note that Napa Firewise does not endorse any specific fire prevention products or services.)

One Less Spark Means One Less Wildfire

by Carol Rice, Fire Risk Consultant to Napa Firewise

With continued dry conditions predicted this year, everyone needs to be especially careful to prevent wildfire ignitions. Recent dry winds have further increased the danger of wildfire. We all need to be aware of fire conditions in our community and take appropriate prevention measures. The majority of wildfire starts are human-caused, from sources that include power equipment, vehicles, escaped debris burning, and arson.



Did you know that tow chains are a source of wildfire ignition? Check and adjust chains for safety!

A tiny spark from improperly used equipment is one of the most frequent causes of wildfire in California, especially in the summer months. Vehicle travel provides opportunities for **sparks** and other heat sources to ignite dry, fine grasses. **Sparks** from dragging chains, flat tires, faulty spark arrestors, catalytic converters, mufflers and engines are common causes of fires in the state.

Many equipment and roadway fires are preventable with simple actions. Here are some specific steps you can take year-round to minimize the chance of wildfire:

- Do all yard maintenance that requires a gas or electrical motor before 10 a.m., when temperatures are down and the relative humidity is higher.
- Be sure equipment such as mowers and trimmers have **spark arrestors**. Hot exhaust pipes and mufflers can start a fire that you won't even see before it is too late!
- Use string vegetation trimmers to cut tall, dry grass.
- Remove rocks to avoid metal mower blades hitting rocks and creating **sparks**. Rocks hidden in grass or weeds can spark a wildfire.
- Grind, sharpen, or weld on a paved, enclosed area.

- Be ready with water and a fire extinguisher to put out **accidental sparks**.

- Report all fires: Call 9-1-1.

Vehicle travel provides opportunities for sparks and heat sources to ignite dry, fine grasses. Towing, whether it is towing boats, equipment or horse trailers, brings an added risk of wildfire. Here are some additional steps

you can take to prevent wildfire:

- Maintain your brakes.
- Keep tires properly inflated.
- Don't let towing chains drag – dragging chains will throw sparks.
- Shorten towing safety chains.
- Ensure that nothing is dragging beneath the car (exhaust pipes, etc.)
- Don't pull off into the dry grass or brush. Park well away from grasses; catalytic converters are hot and can start fires.
- Carry a fire extinguisher in your car, and know how to use it.
- Report all fires: Call 9-1-1.

Each of us has the responsibility to prevent human-caused wildfires. Creating Firewise communities that champion the use of defensible space is one way we can make a huge difference. For more information about how to become involved in a Firewise community, visit www.napafirewise.org. Additional information about the One Less Spark program can be found at www.preventwildfireca.org/onelesspark.

The Soda Canyon Fire — A Lesson In Defensible Space

by Rick Thornberry, Director, Napa Firewise



Aerial view showing path of Soda Fire. Arrows show the pathway of the fire and defensible space protected this house



Scorched earth, but the defensible space held!

On the early afternoon of February 23, 2012, I stood in horror in my neighbor's front yard on a high knoll overlooking my house and vineyard as I watched the wildland fire (later named the Soda Fire) race up the ridgeline next to my vineyard and toward my house.

The flames must have been fifty feet long, and instead of reaching to the sky, they were almost horizontal due to the very strong north wind that was blowing in the same direction the fire was advancing.

The smoke was extremely thick as I watched it envelope my house. In fact, I couldn't see my house for what seemed like an eternity as the flames glowed fiercely through the smoke. And, I thought, there's going to be a lot of fire and smoke damage. I was certain that windows would be broken out by the intense heat and flames, allowing the fire to get into my house.

Since my well head and above-ground irrigation header for my eight vineyard blocks were made with plastic pipe, and situated between my house and the advancing wildfire, I thought for sure that it would all be melted as it, too, disappeared in the swirling smoke just before I lost sight of my house.

When the flames finally subsided and the smoke cleared, much to my excitement, my house was still there and it wasn't burning! I couldn't see the irrigation manifold very well, as my viewing spot was probably about a half mile or more away, but later examination found it to be intact and undamaged! It was obvious that the fire was stopped dead in its tracks when it reached the edge of my defensible space.

The vineyard was also unharmed by the fire since my gravel driveway, along with the brush clearing I had done along both sides, served as a fuel break that was also wide enough to reduce the effects of the flames and radiant heat generated by the fire.

My hard work and perseverance had paid off – and that's exactly what CAL FIRE/Napa County Fire Department and the Napa County volunteer fire fighters said to me later.

You see, I had made it a very high priority to create a minimum 150-foot-wide defensible space perimeter

around my house, and a fuel break for my vineyard. If I hadn't had the wisdom and determination to clear the brush and trim up the trees to create my defensible space, there's no doubt that my irrigation header would have been destroyed, a portion of my vineyard would have been burned, and most important, my house would have suffered severe fire damage even though the fire fighting crews and equipment were right there. The raging wildfire driven by 40 to 50 mph warm, dry winds was just too powerful for them to control.

Thanks to that harrowing yet important lesson, I'm now working diligently to create an additional 150 feet of defensible space so my house will have at least a 300 foot buffer against future wildfires that are sure to happen up here in the eastern hills of Napa Valley. It's worth noting that CAL FIRE/Napa County Fire Department can require as much as 100 to 300 feet of defensible space around homes located in very high fire hazard severity zones, which are generally located in relatively steep, mountainous areas with plentiful, dense wildland fire fuels. Adequate defensible space can make all the difference when a wildfire threatens your property.

For more information about what you can do to protect your property from wildfires, check out the Napa Communities Firewise Foundation website at www.napafirewise.org.

About the author: Rick Thornberry has lived in Napa since 1982. He owns Soda Canyon Ranch Vineyards and is an active member of the Napa County Farm Bureau and the Napa Valley Grapegrowers. Mr. Thornberry is also a professional fire protection engineer specializing in fire code compliance. He lives in a fire-hardened home of his own design with his wife Gail.

Please support the community efforts of Napa Firewise with a tax-deductible donation. A convenient envelope is enclosed.

NAPA FIREWISE BULLETIN SPRING 2014



Napa Communities
Firewise Foundation
P.O. Box 4151
Napa, CA 94558

NOTE:
if you are mailing
copies of this newsletter
privately you must
use a stamp

PRESORT
STANDARD
U.S. POSTAGE PD
Napa, CA
Permit #103

Endorsed by



BAY AREA
AIR QUALITY
MANAGEMENT
DISTRICT



Fireman's Fund
Insurance Company



FIREWISE BULLETIN INFORMATION

FIREWISE HEADQUARTERS

Napa County Firewise
1199 Big Tree Road
St. Helena, CA 94574
707-967-1426

Email: info@napafirewise.org
Web: www.napafirewise.org



www.facebook.com/napafirewise



www.twitter.com/napafirewise

FIREWISE CHIPPING PROGRAM

Hotline: 707-967-1426
Mail: P.O. Box 4151, Napa, CA 94558

NAPA FIREWISE FREE CHIPPING! ONLINE APPLICATIONS START MARCH 17

BE PREPARED FOR WILDFIRE!
No limit on the amount we will chip!
For application information visit
www.napafirewise.org
or call the Chipping Hotline
at 707-967-1426

*Sponsored by
CAL FIRE/Napa County Fire Department
and
the Napa Communities Firewise Foundation*