

THE KEY TO A SAFER TOMORROW

**FIREWISE**  
BULLETIN

AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 2013

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**Wildfire Triage — It's Good to Be the "Chosen One"**

*by Tom Vreeland, NCCF Director*

Say "triage" and most people will think of an emergency medical situation, where being chosen first is not necessarily a good thing. It means your injuries are the most serious. Triage is a succinct term for assessing how to best prioritize limited resources.

The term applies to fighting fires when the number of firefighters and equipment available at a scene are limited. There are only so many resources available, and decisions must be made on how to best allocate them.

The triage decision often applies when protecting houses from wildfire—as there can be more houses in imminent danger than there are resources to protect them. Applying the logic of a doctor evaluating patients, one might think that the houses with the most need—meaning the least fire-hardened (prepared), and most likely to catch fire—are the ones that get chosen. However, if a difficult choice must be made between two homes, the home that is the most likely to be saved is the one chosen. Choosing to protect the home that is difficult or unsafe (lacking defensible space and other basics) instead of the fire-hardened home may result in both homes being lost rather than just one.

Being "firewise" about your property not only makes it less likely to catch fire, but also makes it easier to protect

from fire. Clearing weeds and brush within a safe perimeter, removing flammable landscaping close to the house (especially under eaves), clearing leaves in roof gutters, cutting back tree limbs away from the house, etc., reduce the risk of fire and create a defensible space—meaning a zone that can be defended from fire. Defensible space is imperative if you live in a wildland urban interface (WUI), or as many simply say, the country. Creating the safe perimeter provides self-protection in the event fire arrives at your property ahead of the fire crews. It also helps make your house a "chosen one" if tough decisions need to be made.

The intent of this article is to encourage homeowners to take action to protect themselves against fire and point out the possibility and concept of fire triage. Please do not think that if one doesn't heed the firewise call to action, that fire fighters will ignore your property. This simply is not the case. Firefighters will always do the best that they are capable of in protecting you and your property. The unfortunate reality is that their resources are not unlimited.

The phrase "God helps those who help themselves" is an appropriate analogy, regardless of your religious beliefs. Help yourself be firewise so others can better help you in a fire emergency—be the chosen one!

OUR THOUGHTS ARE WITH THE MEMBERS OF THE GRANITE MOUNTAIN HOTSHOTS WHO PERISHED DOING THEIR JOB NEAR PRESCOTT, ARIZONA.

# Making Wise Power Tool Choices in Summer

*Tom Vreeland, NCCF Director*

The “golden” moniker described our state earlier than usual this year. The hills turning golden brown (a euphemism for “drying out”) herald a time to rethink our outdoor activities—especially concerning the necessary use of power tools for weed and brush abatement.

## **Tool Tips:**

Metal blades for weed whackers need to be retired for the season these can easily spark a fire when nicking rocks or other materials. Replace them with plastic string heads to reduce fire danger.

If you live in a rocky area, a tap feed string head is recommended. Fixed string or plastic arm cutter heads simply don’t hold up against constant rock engagement (you’ll spend more time replacing string or arms than actually cutting). For serious work, a straight shaft gas trimmer that handles a line size 0.100 inch or better is highly recommended.

Chain saws may still be used, but with even more caution. Always insure the chain is sharp, as a dull chain tends to burn the wood more than cutting it. A dull chain also can lead to injury as one tries to force the cut rather than letting the saw do the work. Brush may still be cut, but one must be extra cautious not to nick rocks in the process. Rock sparks can easily cause fires in addition to damaging the chain. We recommend cutting a little higher up the stalk to insure a rock-free cut.

Lawn mowers should be kept free of clipping build-up. Dry clippings can easily ignite near hot exhausts or spinning shafts. A power washing is an easy way to maintain your mower clipping-free. This is especially important with riding mowers that have deck top belts and pulleys. Check blade drive shafts for materials that can get wound up, such as long fibrous weeds or rope. Be careful when mowing to avoid rocks which could spark and dull blades.

Rototillers and trenchers rotate metal tines and teeth at a relatively low speed. The risk of sparking off a rock is therefore minimized, but care should still be exercised. Rock sparks are only an issue above ground, as below ground dirt will snuff a spark.



*A “candy store” of weed whackers ready for action!*

## **Timing Tips:**

Working outside early in the day is recommended for several reasons, not the least of which is that it is cooler for you while working. Spring and summer mornings can be cool and damp in Napa. This is the perfect time to mow a lawn or do other activities where sparks might be generated. This will lessen the possibility of a fire. Hot and dry afternoons are not a good time for the lawn itself, nor for fire safety. If you live in a rocky, dry, snake-infested area, you’ll find them far slower and easier to contend with in the cooler time of day.

## **Safety Tips:**

It almost goes without saying, to be safe in everything you do. Wear appropriate clothing and protective gear for whatever activity you are endeavoring. Remember that something as innocuous as mowing the lawn should include ear protection. Know your equipment and how to operate it safely before attempting any work. Have a water source, such as garden sprayer filled with water or hose, nearby any potential work where sparks may occur. Think about what you are going to do before working. Read equipment instructions prior to using the equipment rather than after something has gone wrong. And don’t forget to make sure all equipment requiring spark arresters is in safe working order. Last but not least, don’t get hurt trying to make your house fire safe!

## NAPA COMMUNITIES RALLY AROUND WILDFIRE AWARENESS

by Roger Archey, Editor

Napa, Calif. (July 13, 2013)—The second annual Napa Communities Firewise Foundation (NCF) meeting began on a somber note as Foundation President Darren Drake acknowledged the tragic death of 19 members of the Granite Mountain Hotshot Crew in a wildland fire near Prescott, Arizona.

“In the memory of the Granite Mountain Hotshot Crew, I would like to underscore our efforts today in raising the awareness of the serious nature of wildfire in our community, and thank all of you who give your time and talents in helping us prepare this community for the inevitability of a major wildfire,” said Drake.

Meeting attendees included members of the Napa Firewise Board of Directors; Fire Safe Council leadership from throughout Napa County; county supervisors Diane Dillon, Mark Luce, Keith Caldwell and Brad Wagenknecht; Faith Berry, a Firewise advisor from the National Fire Protection Association, and Scott Upton, Napa County Fire Chief.

The goal of the meeting was to acknowledge individual community accomplishments in wildfire planning and mitigation over the past year, and to celebrate the amazing results achieved by a handful of dedicated volunteers with the support of Napa Firewise and county government.

Stephen Gort, NCF vice president and treasurer, received shouts and applause when he announced that the Napa Firewise is fully funded for fiscal 2013 by Napa County Fire. More good news was announced by Chief Upton when he confirmed that Napa County Fire would add the



*Attendees at Napa Firewise annual meeting in Napa*

new chipper to their equipment inventory. In previous years NCF had purchased the program chipper with grants and donations. Having the chipper as a regular asset of the County Fire Department removes a large financial burden from Napa Firewise.

*The meeting continued with reports from each community. Here are some highlights:*

- **Circle Oaks** continues to be a success story, owing in large part to a mandatory fire prevention program and aggressive leadership—gaining national recognition as a FirewiseUSA community. Circle Oaks recently completed a 3/4-mile shaded fuel break at the north boundary of the community.

- **Berryessa Highlands** is a shining example of how advanced fire planning is making a difference. Their focus has been on targeting high significant fuel concentrations and making roads

*story continues inside on next page*

## NAPA COMMUNITIES RALLY... CONTINUED

safer and more accessible.

- **Soda Canyon/Loma Vista** is like many rural communities—one-way access and exit. With this in mind, the community has cleared nearly three miles of roadway and is in the process of replacing many older home address signs with modern, highly reflective ones.

- **Berryessa Estates** continues to be a prime example of what it takes to live safely in a rural setting. The most vulnerable part of their community is surrounded by a shaded fuel break, and a Firewise presence has become commonplace. The work continues.

- **Mt. Veeder** is a 26,000-acre community of 450+ homes and hundreds of trails and country roads. The scale of the problem is enormous. Their primary projects are the replacement of antiquated address signs and the continuation of ridge-top shaded fuel breaks around key watersheds. They have a dedicated volunteer corps that is making a difference.

- **Atlas Peak** is a collection of 150 homes on 7,000 acres of rocky, brush-choked ground. Road and signage are their immediate goals. More than seven miles of roadside have been weed whacked since last year and written approval has been obtained to utilize existing



*Faith Berry, National Fire Protection Association advisor, and Napa Supervisor Diane Dillon, discussing wildfire awareness in Napa County*

escape routes under the supervision of CAL FIRE and the county sheriff.

The presentations concluded on a high note as each Supervisor reinforced the others by saying Napa Firewise is a model of community collaboration and has become an essential part of the community. Every taxpayer benefits from these programs.

# FEMA

## FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

[www.ready.gov/wildfires](http://www.ready.gov/wildfires)

***Visit this website and learn more about wildfire planning.  
It's also a great site for general disaster preparedness.***

**BEFORE A WILDFIRE • PLAN YOUR WATER NEEDS**

**PREPARING YOUR HOME FOR A WILDFIRE**

**PRACTICE WILDFIRE SAFETY • FOLLOW LOCAL BURNING LAWS**

# A First Responder's Worst Nightmare: Unclear Addresses

*Tom Vreeland, NCCF Director*

There are times when a home really needs to be found, and found quickly. A first responder's hesitation, or worse yet a wrong turn, can cost minutes when seconds count. If there is an emergency, whether it be medical, fire or otherwise, you need a clear pathway to your location. One shouldn't depend solely upon a responder's knowledge of your community, as they might be new or unfamiliar with your area. GPS (global positioning systems) is only as good as the database, which can be incorrect and often don't include lengthy private drives.

The solution is easy and very effective; reflective address signage. Reflective numbers on a reflective background are easily read during the day and stand out like a homing beacon at night. Signs are inexpensive and can be installed on a metal post in a matter of minutes.

Knowing where to turn off the main road may only be part of the solution. If you live down a private drive with other homes, it is important to have the same reflective address signs at each road intersection (Y or T) and at your own house or drive.

In Napa County, we are fortunate to have a network of Fire Safe Councils helping their local communities. Two such councils, Mt. Veeder and Atlas Peak, are actively working to help all their neighbors install new reflective address signs.

Remember, reflective signs are for your own safety and benefit. Though you are helping a first responder locate you, you are the one in need of their help.



*Left-right: Gary Margandant, Kelly Wallace and Bill Robertson making reflective address signs for Mt. Veeder community members.*



*A "mailbox tree" can add to the confusion of finding your location. Additional individual reflective signs are best.*



*Example of reflective metal sign installed on Atlas Peak.*

**Remember, reflective signs are for your own safety and benefit. Though you are helping a first responder locate you, you are the one in need of their help.**



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

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**CONTACT INFORMATION**

**FIREWISE HEADQUARTERS**

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

Email: [info@napafirewise.org](mailto:info@napafirewise.org)  
Web: [www.napafirewise.org](http://www.napafirewise.org)



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**FIREWISE CHIPPING PROGRAM**

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

**NAPA FIREWISE BULLETIN EDITOR**

Contact: Roger Archey  
415.927.4207 or email at  
[rarchey@pacbell.net](mailto:rarchey@pacbell.net)

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