

THE KEY TO A SAFER TOMORROW

FIREWISE BULLETIN

MARCH 2013

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Deer Park Prepares for Wildfire



Firewise workshop on January 27 in Deer Park

Roger Archey, NCCF Newsletter Editor

It was a pleasant Sunday afternoon when neighbors and friends gathered at the Deer Park Community Hall to share a common concern — wildfire!

The event was one of several wildfire workshops held throughout the county each year by Napa Firewise, a non-profit wildfire awareness Foundation that has been working for the good of Napa residents since 2005.

The goal of the workshops is to build a stronger awareness of the dangers of wildfire in our county and help establish community-driven Fire Safe Councils by offering the tools, knowledge and financial ability to sustain a strategic offensive against a type of disaster we can do something about. While we can't stop a flood or tsunami, we can go a long way in stopping a fire with defensible space planning and fuel management techniques.

The two-hour workshop was well-attended and included a call to action from Napa County Supervisor Diane Dillon. Supervisor Dillon encouraged the audience to take advantage of the county-supported Firewise program and get organized.

For information about future workshops and how you can become involved in your community, check out our website at napafirewise.org. It will be time well spent.

'TIS THE SEASON TO PREPARE...

by Tom Vreeland, NCCF Director

'Tis not yet fire season, so 'tis the season to prepare. Now is the time to plan projects to accomplish prior to the summer fire season, such as:

Extend Your Fire Safety Perimeter:

Defensible space regulations call for brush and weed perimeters around structures. One needs to remember that these are the minimum distances for safety. Extending beyond what is required increases your safety margin. One should endeavor to extend the distance to the perimeter each year. After a few years, you'll have a much safer boundary and nicer-looking landscape.

Brush Removal:

The ideal time for cutting brush is when the hills are green and damp. I find a chain saw and straight shaft brush whacker with a metal blade the perfect combination for attacking brush. The whacker can take down brush as large as one inch in diameter. The trick is to rev the engine and swing into the cut relatively low, but above the rocks and ground. This effectively clears thin brush and enables access to larger, tougher brush trunks. Chain saws should be used for larger diameters, taking care to not nick rocks with the blade or allow blade to be jammed by felling scraggly brush. Properly used, these tools will quickly clear a large swath through whatever brush is encountered. A tip I will share is to cut on longer stems of brush and use the long stem as a "pike" to haul out shorter branches. Without basic efficiency, you'll spend far more time hauling your cuttings away than the actual cutting.

Metal blades, rocks, and dry grass don't mix – they are a recipe for a wildfire, the same type you are working to protect yourself from. Brush cutting should be limited to this time of year, prior to or after the summer fire season.

Weeds:

Attacking weeds and dry grasses is all about timing.

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Space — The Not-So Final Frontier?

by Carol Rice, Defensible Space Consultant

At a recent Home Ignition Zone Workshop I gave a pep talk on developing and maintaining defensible space. Defensible space is where firefighters take a stand to save your home – where space exists between the ground and tree branches, between individual bushes, and between structures and vegetation. Defensible perimeters keep flames at bay. More houses are saved by pre-fire actions than by the best fire fighting forces. We defend against heat transfer to

houses. Three types of heat ignition sources are **direct flame contact**, **radiant heat**, and **embers**.

Direct flame contacts are dramatic, but are likely to last only ninety seconds in burning vegetation. However, burning structures may last an hour. Hotter (longer) flames ignite homes more easily. Vertical surfaces – siding and windows – are most at risk. Remember, vegetation provides a path for flames to reach the structure.

Radiant heat is that wave of heat from afar. Distance is your friend, since radiation decreases with

TIS THE SEASON TO PREPARE...

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The timing is different depending upon method choice: herbicide or sting trimmer. It is up to individual choice as to preference between the two. Many people are against herbicides and prefer whacking. In terms of the environment, I believe it is literally “pick your poison” – one either sprays chemicals on the ground or pollutes the air by burning gas and oil mix. Spraying is faster and easier than whacking. The problem with spraying is timing; if you spray before the last rain of the season, you’ll be spraying again. But if you wait too long, you’ll have to whack anyway. With cutting, you wait until everything starts to dry out in May and further rains are unlikely.

Some contend that applying a pre-emergent is the solution – to prevent the weeds from growing rather than attack once established. This is another type of herbicide that prevents weeds from growing. The timing of application is very important for effectiveness: it should be applied twice a year, nominally Sept. 15th and March 15th, to attack cold and warm weather weeds. I have not been successful with this option, but that could just be me. Ask your local nursery if you have any doubts on timing or methods.

Trees:

Limbing up trees to a safe height and removing dead limbs is something that can be safely done year round. Pruning shears, a pruning hand saw, chain saw and a pole chain saw are my weapons of choice. One needs to be careful to cut close to the parent trunk or limb without nicking or cutting it. Partially cutting through a branch and letting it fall, peeling back bark from the parent, is also poor form. Lower limbs are easily singled out for removal, as are accessible dead limbs. Beyond

these, it is strongly suggested that one leave tree trimming to a trained arborist.

Brush Disposal:

So now that you have effectively cut brush and tree limbs – what do you do with the fruits of your work? The best solution is to haul it to a roadside location, stack appropriately and contact the Firewise chipping program. This is a free service that will turn your brush into wood chips. If access is such that chipping is not an option, one can burn piles in place. Though this is not a preferred method for a variety of reasons, it is still possible. There are restrictions on burning brush piles, so please contact your local Cal Fire office for advice. Another option is to lop and scatter the debris throughout the treatment area, which is basically cutting up your cuttings so they will decompose over time. For your information, chipping debris is not generally considered a fire hazard if it is spread over a large area and kept close (several inches) to the ground; the chips decompose quickly – within a few years.

Safety:

It goes without saying that safety is paramount. Proper safety gear should be worn at all times. My favorite is a helmet with face shield and ear protection. And don’t forget water! Water to drink and water to extinguish a careless fire of your own doing. You would be surprised how many wildfires start by someone doing the right thing the wrong way. One should know how to use equipment properly prior to any “weekend warrior” activity.

For some this article is a reminder of the obvious; for others it may be a revelation. In either case, ‘TIS the perfect time to maintain your defensible space landscaping BEFORE fire season officially arrives.

the square of the distance. Like flames, radiation acts against vertical surfaces, as well as higher portions of a building. Radiant heat can be long-lived if a burning structure is nearby.

Embers are small sources of heat that cram into nooks and crannies, coalescing to be an insidious ignition source. Embers are now considered a major cause of structure ignition.

These little brands land on receptive beds of fuels, especially in inside corners and on horizontal surfaces, such as pine needles on the roof, dry grass, or old patio furniture. Because embers can smolder

for a long time, they can burn down a house after a firefighter leaves, thinking the fire is out and it is safe. But embers also start fires well ahead of the fire front, and can ignite a house in a middle of a football field if the house itself is flammable.

By creating space between plants, and space between your house and plants, and by employing an understanding of the three types of heat transfer, you can target your mitigation actions to be more effective. In the coming newsletters the treatments/actions to create and maintain these three zones will be discussed in more detail. Stay tuned!

How to Start Your Own Fire Safe Council

Tom Vreeland, NCCF Director

Organizing a community fire safe council is not as difficult as it may seem. Finding a few residents of the community interested in the cause is generally the easy part. The formula the Napa Communities Firewise Foundation (NCCF) has used to sift through a community data base has been to host a "Firewise" awareness seminar. These seminars are generally well attended, and there is always some percentage of attendees willing to step up and say they'd like to be involved more in their community. The motivation for raising one's hand ranges from altruistic — simply wanting to help the community — to self-interest — wanting their home safer from fires. There needs to be a spark plug(s) among the raised hands willing to take charge, and there generally is at least one. This is the easy part.

The harder part starts once you get the group of concerned residents together. Everyone is eager to get started, and the problem is figuring out what to do. Once again NCCF comes to the rescue, offering advice and suggestions. In addition to general guidance, staff experts help out directly with community fire assessments, communications (newsletters and workshops) and Firewise planning. The time comes, though, when not unlike a mother bird pushing an offspring from the nest, a fledging council needs to fly on their own. The council needs to start taking their own initiative and begin addressing their community needs. Figuring out what to do and how to fund it are the challenges. NCCF helps with ideas and grants, but

each individual council needs to decide the priorities for their community.

Oddly enough, getting work done is easier than figuring out what to do and how to pay for it. Managing a local contractor familiar with brush abatement work is not difficult — they know how to do the job; it's their business. One needs to make sure the scope of work is clear, and monitor progress. If a project involves private property, permission from the landowner is required prior to any work. Almost universally, property owners are more than happy that work will be done free of charge on their property to improve fire safety and beautification. It is not a difficult sell to get approval.

My motivation for being a founding member of the Atlas Peak Fire Safe Council (APFSC) was a mixture of wanting to give something back to the community and my own family's safety. I look back on what we've accomplished since we first got together a few years ago and am amazed. I will not say that it has all been easy, because it takes an investment of time and energy. I will, however, say that it has been extremely satisfying. Each day as I drive our road I look at the work that was done clearing brush and limbing up trees along our road and am amazed. It is a great feeling to look out and think, wow, I was a part of getting this done. I've gotten to know my neighbors better throughout the community. The many thanks, appreciation and recognition from the community guarantee my satisfaction and continued work.

New Firewise Team members

Tom Vreeland



Tom Vreeland, NCFE Director

November 16, 2012. — The Napa Communities Firewise Foundation Board of Directors (NCFE) announced that Tom Vreeland has joined the non-profit as its newest Director.

“We are fortunate to have Tom as a Board member,” says Stephen Gort, NCFE’s treasurer and vice president. “As a founding member of the Atlas Peak Fire Safe Council, Tom demonstrates the ideal mix of commitment and spirit necessary to sustain a community-based effort like Napa Firewise.”

Vreeland, a fifth generation Napan, is the vice president of sales and marketing for AP Tech (Advanced Pressure Technology), a manufacturer of specialty pressure regulators for the semiconductor industry. He lives on Atlas Peak with his wife and son.

Amy Head



Captain Amy Head, Napa County Fire Department

The Napa Communities Firewise Foundation (NCFE) recently welcomed Napa County Fire Captain Amy Head to its team. Captain Head was appointed by Napa County Fire Chief Scott Upton as a liaison to NCFE. Captain Head’s responsibilities include the planning and coordination of Konocti and Delta Camp Fire Crews used by the Napa Firewise program. She also coordinates the popular Firewise free chipping program used by county residents for defensible space development and maintenance. In addition to her duties with Firewise, Captain Head is the official contact person for the Napa County Fire Department for information regarding emergency incidents. She also works with various schools to develop Fire Prevention programs.

Captain Head is a 16-year veteran of CAL FIRE, having been promoted through the ranks of Firefighter to Captain. She lives in Sonoma County with her firefighter husband and young son.

Funding Firewise



The Napa Communities Firewise Foundation relies on the support and goodwill of community leaders, state and local government, the business sector, the media, and hundreds of private citizens who are willing to share the responsibility of protecting our community from wildfire. We thank you.

Napa Firewise Wildfire Mitigation Grants Awarded

The Napa Communities Firewise Foundation (NCF) recently announced the award of nearly \$65,000 in wildfire mitigation grants to six local Fire Safe Councils. These Councils include Atlas Peak (\$11,000); Berryessa Estates (\$10,200); Circle Oaks (\$6,000); Berryessa Highlands (\$16,000); Mt. Veeder/Dry Creek (\$10,000), and Soda Canyon (\$10,000).

Stephen Gort, NCF vice president and treasurer, says the grants are a vital part of Napa County's ongoing wildfire mitigation efforts that started in 2005 with a highly successful Firewise

free chipping program. "The grants are targeted at concentrated, on-the-ground mitigation work," says Gort. "We are talking about building shaded fuel breaks around key infrastructures and critical access routes, clearing brush-choked roadways, and maintaining once-cleared vegetation from years past."

The grants were awarded through a competitive process that required each Fire Safe Council to submit a comprehensive Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP).

NAPA FIREWISE COMMUNITY PROJECT SUMMARY



Konocti Fire Crews at work at Berryessa Estates



Great example of defensible space landscaping.



Tucker Acres Work Team

Atlas Peak:

The community is continuing an aggressive roadside-clearing program begun last year. The goal is to complete mitigation efforts along Atlas Peak Road and in portions of Atlas Peak Canyon during the 2013 program season. Some vegetation burning will be required.

Berryessa Estates:

John Hallman continues to coordinate and supervise the efforts of Cal Fire's Konocti Fire crews to burn brush piles and plan future mitigation actions.

Berryessa Highlands:

Delta Fire Crews have been working in the community since early January, cutting and piling brush for chipping and burning. Smoke notices and program updates are being posted on the community Facebook page.

Circle Oaks:

Circle Oaks has completed an update of their Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). Funding is from the community Home Owner Association.

Mt. Veeder/Dry Creek:

Work continues on a community shaded fuel break. Cal Fire Captain Amy Head is coordinating burn timing and requirements with Delta Fire Crew.

Soda Canyon:

Roadside fuel mitigation efforts are underway in the Loma Vista area of Soda Canyon. Once local landowner permission is confirmed, the work should only take 3+ weeks.



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