

THE KEY TO A SAFER TOMORROW

FIREWISE BULLETIN

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LOCAL FIRE EXPERT BRINGS BACK LESSONS LEARNED FROM "WALDO" FIRE IN COLORADO



2012 Waldo Fire in Colorado. (Courtesy Denver Post)

Roger Archey, NCCFF Newsletter Editor

One of the enjoyable things about being part of Napa Firewise is the access to some very talented and informed colleagues on the subject of fire science and wildfire prevention. One such colleague is **Carol Rice**, a fire risk and vegetation management consultant to NCCFF. I recently interviewed Carol about her experiences in Colorado at the Waldo fire, and what she learned there that we can apply here in Napa County.

As you may recall, the Waldo fire is considered the most destructive wildfire in Colorado history. Over 18,000 acres were burned, 350 homes incinerated, over \$100 million dollars in losses, and over \$16 million dollars in suppression costs – and two deaths! At one point in time over 30,000 people were evacuated. This man-made fire raged from late June until mid-July.

Carol, what got you to the Waldo fire?

I was fortunate to accompany senior fire officials from Cal Fire and local fire departments to Colorado to review a parcel-based risk assessment of the fire area. We were able to see how our assumptions tracked against previous planning and the reality of the fire. What we found were three key factors in why the losses were so great. In a

nutshell, the majority of the homes lost were from ember intrusion, combustible siding, and the lack of fire-resistant decking along with deck maintenance issues.

More and more fire scientists are concluding that ember broadcast is a leading cause of structure ignition in wildfire situations.

What can be done?

Assuming you have a non-combustible roof, probably the best solution at the moment is to invest in upgrading attic vents, screens and baffles. This needs to be considered in new construction as well as remodeling. Another important factor is to keep vegetation away from all vents and openings. This is basic!

What about siding?

It was interesting to note that Colorado doesn't have a code requirement for non-combustible siding. Neither does California, for that matter. This will likely change in the future.

Why were decks such a problem, and what can we learn?

Decks were a real problem from the standpoint of embers sticking between debris-filled cracks, and ignition from combustible patio furniture and under-deck storage. The combination of decks and sliding glass doors and windows exacerbates the problem of fire transmission when the windows and doors fail. My advice is to use fire-resistant decking and commit to a rigorous maintenance regime. If you know a fire is coming, move as much of the combustible deck furniture inside, or as far away from the house as possible. If your deck is located near vents, close those vents if possible. I saw a great example of a home that was saved by

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Napa Firewise Announces Art Contest Winners

As a kickoff to National Fire Prevention Week (October 7-13), Napa Firewise announced the winning twelve entries for its 2012 fire prevention art contest. Each winner received a cash award of \$100 dollars and mention on the Napa Firewise website; National Fire Protection Association site; and starting in January, monthly mention in the Napa Valley Register.

Darren Drake, Firewise President, said the theme of the contest, "Wildfire Hurts Everyone," echoes a real concern by fire officials that a major wildfire is likely in our community. "We pay a price for living in wildfire country," says Drake. "The more we understand about wildfire behavior and the more awareness we all have about our risks (at all ages), the better prepared we will be when the inevitable happens. And it will!"

"This was our first art contest," said Drake. "We couldn't be more pleased with the results. Children's art is undeniably honest. The contest was a great way to engage our children with an important take-home message that wildfire is a real and present danger to everyone. If you see the art you will appreciate what I mean. It's highly creative and very sobering."

Contest winners range from age 6 to 11. They were recruited from Boys & Girls Club after school and summer camp programs throughout Napa County. Winning entries were:

- Aurora Schueler, age 8
- Cali Olmstead, age 10
- Stephanie Soriano, age 9
- Marc Forns, age 7
- Natalie Tedder, age 8
- Natasha Cinq-Mars, age 8 ½
- Diego Vasquez, age 9



Artwork by Stephanie Soriano, age 9



Artwork by Emily Teagarden, age 9

- Antonio Napoles, age 8
- Emily Teagarden, age 9
- Haley Hitchins, age 9
- Emma Kluz, age 11
- Carmenlina Newton, age 8

To see all twelve winning entries, visit the Napa Firewise website at www.napafirewise.org.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM COLORADO FIRE CONT.

the owner duct taping all his vents closed. It really worked!

Do you have a final message for our readers?

It was a sobering experience to see the scale of

the Waldo fire and the destruction of homes and property. The greatest consolation was the fact that there could have been a higher loss of life, and there wasn't. This kind of event could happen in Napa County. We need to practice what we preach and prepare for the worst.

LEARN ABOUT WILDFIRE WITH OUR PUBLICATIONS

Anyone living in California, and Napa County for certain, should have a basic understanding about the risks of wildfire and the steps that can be taken to minimize that risk.

As part of a charter to provide the residents of Napa County with basic wildfire survival information, Napa Firewise is offering county residents two useful, free publications — “A Homeowner’s Guide to Firewise Landscaping in Napa County” and “Living



BELOW is a sample graphic from Living With Fire in Napa County. It shows the three basic causes of home ignition. This great publication (shown ABOVE) is for anyone interested in defensible space planning, the basics of fire science, vegetation management, fire resistant construction tips, and even a wildfire evacuation checklist.

With Fire in Napa County.” Both guides are available at Cal Fire’s headquarters in St. Helena at 1199 Big Tree Road, or at the Napa City Fire Department’s prevention bureau at 1600 First Street in Napa. These brochures can also be requested by emailing Ann Nelson at anelson@cityofnapa.org.

GET YOUR FREE COPY WHILE THEY LAST!

CAUSES OF HOME IGNITION FROM WILDFIRES

During a wildland fire, three conditions stand out as ignition threats to homes and outbuildings



WIND-DRIVEN EMBERS and firebrands blown ahead of the fire that land in areas that catch or trap them. Heat traps include roof valleys and gutters, open eaves, soffits, overhangs, or under decks and balconies.



RADIANT HEAT generally from flammable vegetation or adjacent burning homes that are too close to your home.



DIRECT FLAME CONTACT from flammable native or urban landscaping, attached wood fences and accumulation or storage of flammable materials against the house or under decks.



Note that 50% of the houses with wood roofs and less than 30 feet of vegetation clearance were destroyed by wildfire. But less than 1% of the homes with fire resistant roofs and 100 feet of clearance were destroyed.

Red Flag Warnings: Know What They Mean

NCCF

Red Flag warnings are issued for Napa County and surrounding areas every year, especially during the months of September, October and November. Historically, it is during these Red Flag warnings when we have our largest and most destructive wildland fires.

Lest we forget, the June 22, 1981 Atlas Peak fire, which burned 23,600 acres and destroyed 161 structures, happened under Red Flag conditions.

Red Flag warnings indicate that the risk of wildland fires is much higher than normal. These weather conditions occur when high pressure builds inland and forces airflow from the high areas of the west (think Nevada and the Sierra) down across the Central Valley and over the coastal areas toward the ocean. This airflow is warmer, drier and windier than our routine summer weather – and these weather conditions can make wildland fires extremely difficult, if not impossible, to control.



Citizens can heed the Red Flag warnings by not using wildland recreational areas when they are posted off-limits, and by not smoking outdoors or using "fire pits," barbecues, or having open fires near dry grass and brush. Ninety-nine percent of our fires in Napa County are caused by people or equipment, so managing ourselves is the best way to prevent fires from starting. Be certain not to

use power equipment such as weed whackers, power mowers and chain saws! And have your family evacuation plan handy, to use as a teaching tool at breakfast or dinner with the family. A quick five minute discussion is easy to do and can be invaluable if the worst does occur.

It is important to remember that fire season is not over just because the kids have gone back to school and fall colors are in the air. Wildfire preparedness should be a year-round concern for anyone living in California and the West. Pay heed the next time you hear there is a Red Flag alert in your community!

SODA CANYON HOLDS START-UP MEETING

NCCF Editor

The Napa Communities Firewise Foundation (NCCF) sponsored a successful community start-up meeting on August 2nd at the Mallen home on Shady Oaks Dr. in Napa. This meeting followed an earlier May workshop designed to energize and encourage community participation. It worked!

The focus of the August meeting was to activate the newly-formed Soda Canyon Fire Safe Council by prioritizing projects aimed at improving firefighter access and safety, improving communications and signage, and reducing wildfire hazards. At the August meeting a group of ten residents voted on a set of fourteen projects developed by NCCF's wildfire risk consultant, Carol Rice. An immediate priority was set to improve communications through a Call-Em-All® emergency telephone system, and issue a periodic community newsletter. Another priority was helping the local

fire department better locate homes through reflective identification signs and clearer road signage. Future projects will include ongoing roadside vegetation management and opening up access between Atlas Peak Road and Soda Canyon Road. Improvements will also be made in the fire department's ability to access locked gates using non-destructive lock technology.

The newly formed Fire Safe Council is in the process of developing a Community Wildfire Protection Plan that documents the existing fire risk conditions of the area, establishes neighborhood fire prevention goals, and provides professional management and operations support to the new Fire Safe Council team.

If you are interested in joining the volunteer efforts of the Soda Canyon Fire Safe Council, contact info@napafirewise.org and let your needs be known.

CHIPPING UPDATE

A cornerstone of the Napa Communities Firewise Foundation has been its free chipping program for residents of Napa County who are living primarily in areas where wildfire risk is greatest.

This year's chipping program accepted applications from March 1 through September 30. As we went to press with this newsletter the current season's totals were over 650 applications, totaling in excess of 140,000 cubic yards of vegetation. And let's not forget the approximate 10,000 man-hours of labor that went into the clearing and chipping process.

A reminder of chipping basics:

- Maximum individual pile size is 20 feet long by 6 feet high by 10 feet wide.



- There is no limit to the number of piles you can prepare for chipping during the season.

- Chipping is to occur along road/driveway or where our crews can safely access the pile.

- All material to be chipped (Please no Poison Oak) is to be placed along the edge of the road or driveway with the cut ends pointing in one direction – ideally toward the road.

- Stem diameters must be 6 inches and less. No dozer or tractor piles, please.

Tip: The best time to prepare your chipping piles is Fall and Winter, when the fire danger is low and nesting birds are inactive. Additional information about the chipping program can be found online at www.napafirewise.org.

Berryessa Highlands Dodges A Bullet – Defensible Space Pays Off!

Edited from the September 19 Lake Berryessa News

A grass fire started mid-day below the deck and propane tank of a home along Steele Canyon Road. Neighbors ran to help, and using garden hoses they were able to keep the fire contained to a 90-foot by 350-foot section of grass. The fact that the grass had been weed whacked and that the weather was mild helped to make the flame intensity manageable.

CAL FIRE & Capell Valley Volunteer FD arrived to completely contain and extinguish the fire. A CAL

FIRE Delta crew and a CAL FIRE helicopter crew were dispatched, but then called off before they arrived. According to CAL FIRE, "The cause of the fire is still under investigation."

Two lessons (if not many more) can be learned by all landowners in this situation. Defensible space can be the difference between having a house or a pile of ashes. Also, having defensible space around one home makes the other homes in the community more fire safe.

CWPP ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Congratulations go to Berryessa Highlands FSC and Atlas Peak FSC for completing the signature phase of their Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). These two Fire Safe Councils join with Berryessa Estates, Circle Oaks and Mt. Veeder/Dry Creek in establishing a comprehensive action plan for the protection of their communities. Bravo!



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RED FLAG ALERT

Do you know the danger?
Do you know how to respond?
Are you ready?

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