

## **NAPA REGISTER HOME & GARDEN SECTION FOR AUGUST 5, 2006**

### **Suggested Headline: BUILDING A FIREWISE COMMUNITY**

By Mike Wilson, Assistant Napa County Fire Marshal

[Firewise contact: Roger Archey, Balzac Communications & Marketing, 707.255.7667 or [rarchey@balzac.com](mailto:rarchey@balzac.com)]

[Word count: 578]

Napa Firewise is a community effort to raise the awareness of Napa County residents to the dangers of wildland fire in their communities. It's a "grass roots" effort that relies on education, aggressive fire prevention techniques, and neighbor-to-neighbor support. Napa Firewise is patterned after a national communities program called Fire Safe Councils ([www.firesafecouncil.org](http://www.firesafecouncil.org)).

Fire Safe Councils help citizens identify and collaborate with the essential resources needed to build an active fire awareness knowledge base. These resources include government agencies such as fire and police services, public works, outside utility companies, insurance agents, real estate agents, and other useful groups working for a single purpose – preparing a community to survive wildland fire.

Within Napa County, there are a number of communities in high fire-risk areas that have taken an active role in establishing Fire Safe Councils. The Circle Oaks Homeowners' Association is a good example of a community that has prepared itself. Stephen Gort, Circle Oaks resident and Chairman of the community's fire safe committee, says rallying community support is essential and rewarding. "It took a lot of patience and persistence to educate the community on wildland fire," says Gort. "It's a good feeling to know our community understands wildland fire behavior and is prepared." Since 1999, Circle Oaks has been active in fire prevention, having secured grants and community assessments that targeted fuel reduction programs, parcel defensible space inspections, and curbside chipping initiatives.

Other active community associations include Mt. Veeder Fire Safe Council, Angwin Community Council and Gordon Valley. A recent wildland fire in Gordon Valley demonstrated the value of local pre-fire planning and community support. Pat Howard, Gordon Valley resident and fire prevention activist, says it's all about communication and education. "We know the importance of communication when it comes to wildland fire,"

says Howard. “Not long ago we had a wildland fire break out. I immediately called three people, who in turn called people on their lists. Within 20 minutes the community was alerted. We also use walkie-talkies to report fire conditions and keep informed. Our communications plan resulted from our Firewise training and the realization of how important we are to one another.”

Located in the northern part of the county, Berryessa Estates is a high fire-risk community that is taking action to protect its future. Tammy Rossi, Berryessa Estates homeowner and community organizer, says the community’s remote location demands a higher level of community responsibility when it comes to fire prevention. “With longer than normal response times from the County Fire Department, heavy brush conditions, and a single road in and out, we had no choice but to organize the community around Firewise practices,” says Rossi. “And it seems to be paying off. The level of community support is growing with each fire season.”

Other communities that are starting to organize Fire Safe Councils include Deer Park, Madrone Knolls, Upper Alta Heights and Berryessa Highlands. For information on developing your own Fire Safe Council, contact Mike Wilson at [mike.wilson@fire.ca.gov](mailto:mike.wilson@fire.ca.gov) or visit the Fire Safe Council website at [www.firesafecouncil.org](http://www.firesafecouncil.org). Remember, the goal of developing a Fire Safe Council is to build a community response to wildland fire that protects property and saves lives. It’s also a way of sharing responsibility with your neighbors for the overall health and safety of your community.

*About the author:*

*Mike Wilson is Assistant Fire Marshal for Napa County. An 18-year veteran of the fire service, Mike is responsible for fire inspection, code enforcement and the countywide Firewise chipping program.*

###