

Fire and Forest

Fire Abatement Protects Your Home

by Doris Lombard

(from The Town Crier - April 2015)

I am asking board members to write on various topics for this column. Doris Lombard has timely information and thoughts on maintaining defensible space.

Here are her ideas and suggestions:

The big lesson of the 2013 Mountain Fire is burned into my mind. A life threatening, property destroying fire can happen any time on our mountain.

I want to do all I can to learn about and maintain defensible space for my own family's as well as my neighbors' and the fire fighters' safety.

So, today in the breezes of a gentle Santa Ana I walked around the house and imagined embers landing in the pile of needles accumulating under the wooden stairs, on the pine needles bristling out of the gutters and even onto flammable cushions on the porch swing .

Already I had my work cut out for me. I had wanted to work in the garden, doing some weeding while the ground is still moist. Maybe take a few photos of the birds already gathering nesting materials; but I tugged on my work gloves, found the leaf rake all dusty in the shed, avoided a huge nest of swarming ants, pulled out the wheeled trash barrel and went to work.

The tines of the rake got most of the matted mass of needles out, but it took some considerable hand work to dig out those embedded in the soil wedged tightly under the first couple of steps.

Walking around the house, recalling the fire inspection safety checklist I reviewed the night before, I saw the next job to be done. I began to rake up and fill the barrel with the leaves piled by the winds all along the row of

boulders within 20' of the backdoor. Remember, code specifies keeping the ground free of flammable material within 30' of a structure. All dead and or dying vegetation shall be removed from 0-100' from the house. So, underneath the rosemary plants I pulled out the dead leaves and clipped the dead branches.

The pungent scent of the herb rewarded my work , filling the air with fragrance. By now, two barrels were full. Time to add the leafy mulch to the garden. Dragging the barrel around the house, I saw the new growth of ornamental shrubs, rockrose and more rosemary, growing too near the deck and the house siding . To meet code compliance, they need pruning. I'll add that to my list.

Done with abatement for the day, I feel better about the fire safety of our home; and my increased awareness has encouraged me to do a small amount often all throughout the year. A to do list will help me stay on task. As I know too well, a life threatening, property destroying fire can happen any time on our mountain.

The Golden Spotted Oak Borer or GSOB is killing oaks on our mountain. To find out more, attend the GSOB community meeting April 18, 10:00 am at the Nature Center. To find out more, attend the GSOB community meeting at 10 a.m. Saturday, April 18 at the Nature Center.