2011 was a very good year for us. On every measure we use to evaluate our work, we did well. In 2012, we hope to add some new directions. After giving a lot of thought to the future, we have chosen five goals for the coming years.

First is a feasibility study of a bioenergy plant for the community. Others on the mountain have been thinking about this for some time, but we are ready now to look seriously at how we might build a system to generate electricity from all the fuel we remove for fire safety. Technology might have progressed to the point that even a small community like ours could support such a facility. This would mean a truly sustainable future.

Our second goal is to facilitate the clearing of vacant lots, many of which are fire hazards. The county has had trouble trying to get owners to bring them up to code, but we think there are some things we can do to help get the ball rolling.

Next, we will support the maintenance of our community fuelbreaks. These fuelbreaks, so critical to community safety, have a way of growing back. Unfortunately, federal and state money to maintain them does not have the same habit. One possibility is to create an “Adopt-a-Fuelbreak” program where community members could help maintain the land.

Our fourth goal is to engage children in the educational issues around fire. This involves offering a class at the school and at various summer camps.

And, finally, the fifth goal is to extend and improve our outreach to the public on fire safety. In part, we will continue what we have been doing, like the “Firefighters’ Muster” event we co-sponsored with the fire agencies last spring and will do again this year on April 28.

There are new ideas, too. Doris Lombard, a board director and artist, is working on an illustration featuring a red ember that will appear in the Town Crier, and I think that is going to be a big hit. We also want to continue speaking with elected officials about keeping or eliciting their support for fuels programs in the mountains.

These projects, if successful, will represent a big step forward for everyone with a stake in the mountains.

A young visitor learns about fire safety at last year’s Firefighters’ Muster event. This year, it is scheduled for April 28.
Some of the equipment used by the Mountain Communities Fire Safe Council Woodies volunteers has been partially funded through the generosity of the Idyllwild Community Fund.
FIRE-SAFE YOUR PROPERTY—THE SIMPLE VERSION
Mike Esnard

If you read the defensible space codes, you will see lots of items listed to make for a fire safe house. I confess that I don’t use lists very well. I need concepts to make sense of them, so here are some that work for me.

1. STOP FINE FUELS FROM LEADING TO YOUR HOUSE. Leaves and needles ignite easily and can provide a fire path to your home. Don’t let them. Completely clear at least 10 feet from around your house, and from your roof and gutters.

2. ELIMINATE FUEL LADDERS. These vertical “chains” lead to the tree canopy or your roof. An example is dead grass under a bush, which sits under low-hanging branches of a large tree. A fire which can easily start in the grass goes right up through the bush into the trees, moving through the canopy, throwing embers as it goes. The solution is to create space between bushes and tree limbs. Remove bushes or take out limbs. Sizeable trees should be limbed up to at least 6 feet if smaller, limb up a third of the height of the tree. Never let limbs touch the ground.

3. GET RID OF THE DEAD STUFF. Dead leaves, needles and branches ignite easily and spread quickly. The less dead material around your house, the safer it is.

4. SEPARATE FUELS. Don’t allow thick clusters of trees or shrubs anywhere near your house. You will be safer and the trees healthier if you thin the forest on your property.

If you have questions about what to do to fire safe your house and bring it into compliance with fire codes, please call our office (951-659-6208) and talk with one of our project managers. They are real experts. Or consult our website (mcfsc.org) and click on “Education Programs” for detailed information on what to do.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE—BIOMASS UTILIZATION

Leaves and needles, dead shrubs, branches and trees—all of which are disposed constantly as we pursue fire safety. What if they could be used instead to generate electricity or make stove pellets? The resulting money could finance fuel reduction efforts on an ongoing basis, almost insuring us of community fire safety for the indefinite future.

This is the question we are looking at this year as we move ahead with a study to find economic value in our available biomass. MCFSC Board Secretary Ray Barmore is leading the study group which now meets regularly. Ray has been on the Board of Directors for the Anza Electric Co-op for many years, providing him with a long-term interest in this issue, as well as knowledge about the generation and distribution of electricity.

We begin our study with open minds, ready for any answers we might find. Basic questions in front of us are how much biomass we could use, what kinds of generating units are available to our community, and what is the value of output compared to all the operating costs. We know that sustainable biomass use has many challenges, but we think it is time to find out whether the idea is realistic or not. The possibility that it might work is just too important to ignore.

MCFSC board members, staff and the Town Crier’s editor JP Crumrine visited ColMac Generating Planted in Mecca.

It is not so much for its beauty that the forest makes a claim upon men’s hearts, as for that subtle something, that quality of air that emanates from old trees, that so wonderfully changes and renews a weary spirit.
~Robert Louis Stevenson~

The views and conclusions contained in this document are those of the authors and should not be interpreted as representing the opinions or policies of the California Fire Safe Council or the U.S. Government. Mention of trade names or commercial products does not constitute their endorsement by the California Fire Safe Council or the U.S. Government.
**Notes from the Office:** In early summer, MCFSC will convene two meetings to gather community input for our Strategic Plan. The purpose of this activity is to better understand how people view fire safety, how aware they are of the need for fire safety, how they form ideas about fire safety, and how they see MCFSC. In other words, we want to know how people think—their perceptions, beliefs and attitudes—about both fire and our organization.

This knowledge will help us better shape both the content and method of our communication to the community on all issues concerning fire safety. You can help us simply by being willing to share your thoughts on a number of fire safety topics.

Over a working lunch provided by MCFSC, we will discuss various ways to improve our communication and make the mountain communities more fire safe. If you would like to be included in these discussions, please call our office at 951-659-6208.

---

**Firefighters Muster**

**“Ready-Set-Go”**

Saturday, April 28, 11 am-3 pm

at the future site of the

Idyllwild Community Center

(public welcome)

Highlights include:

- K-9 demonstration
- Smokey Bear
- firefighting demonstration
- antique fire engines
- activities for kids & food.

For more information: 951-659-6208

Sponsoring agencies:

Mountain Communities Fire Safe Council appreciates the support of everyone who has sent in membership dues and/or donations. Memberships are valid for one year. We do not send membership reminders, but include a registration form in all newsletters. You are welcome to make a donation or pay membership dues by using PayPal. Just log on to our website (www.mcfsc.org), click the **How to Join** link, then the **Donate** link at the bottom of the page.