

Fire and Forest

More Safe Roofs, Promising New Code

by Mike Esnard

(from The Town Crier - September 2014)

76 is an attractive number, especially in the United States. It brings up the Declaration of Independence (1776), or perhaps the 76 trombones that Professor Harold Hill wanted the town folk to imagine in “The Music Man.”

But for us at the Fire Safe Council, 76 refers to the current number of houses that have been converted from fire prone wooden roofs to Class A fire resistant ones under our reroofing grant.

Think of it—76 homes whose roofs will withstand large embers from a threatening wildfire. 76 homes that are not prone to ignite. That is a lot of homes, and a lot of roofs. If one of these homes was in your neighborhood, you are much safer for that new roof. If you remember the embers that fell from the Mountain Fire last July, you know why this is a very good thing for your home.

This grant started to help homeowners replace roofs last fall. We expect to do more than a 100 (also a good number) roofs before the grant is done sometime next year. Exactly how many will depend on the exact amount of money spent per roof, which is not knowable at this point. But our Executive Director, Edwina Scott, is determined to get as many done as the funds will allow.

This was a quiet summer for fire in the San Jacintos. While fires burned extensively up north, we had some nice monsoonal rains to punctuate the weeks during the state-wide draught. Despite this, it is worth remembering that the strong east winds of the fall are ahead of us, and it is time to revisit the fuel on our properties. Dead grass may need to be cut and removed; and leaves, needles and branches that fell during the storms need to be picked up and taken to the transfer station.

Though it was well covered in the Town Crier, I want to note one of the terrific outcomes to emerge from the Town Hall meeting in June.

We took the comments made at the meeting and brought them up at the Mountain Area Safety Task Force meeting this July, along with our support for resident concerns about overgrown vacant lots and otherwise poorly maintained properties. Riverside County Fire Chief John Hawkins, present at the meeting, committed immediately to creating a task force to revisit the relevant county code (695).

To our delight, the group has already met, chaired by John Hawkins himself, and key people are working to change language in the code that would allow forced abatement of hazardous properties in the mountains. San Bernardino County has such a code and an active program to implement it, and it just so happens that one of the authors of that code, Attorney Sue Nash, lives up here and is lending her expertise to the task force.

There are several major hurdles to clear, including a vote by the Board of Supervisors on new language, but it is looking very good. While I am cautious about making predictions, I will go out on a limb on this one and say that this thing is really going to happen. This change would give fire agencies a great deal more authority to enforce abatement codes on all properties, vacant or developed. We see this as a huge step forward for public safety in the mountain communities.