**Defensible Space: The Year-round Law**

Mountain Communities Fire Safe Council

As we emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic, visitors are returning to our mountain. Some things are returning to normal and somethings are changing.

Homes are being sold and occupied by new residents who have never lived in a forest environment before, and many homes are being sold to folks who are creating Air BnBs and Short Term Rentals instead of permanent occupancy.

Another new item on the hill is the early warning siren used to pre-alert citizens in an emergency in concert with AM radio 1610, WNKI.

One more item that is new is the requirement to abate unimproved parcels in the Idyllwild Fire Protection District (IFPD Ordinance 01-19). MCFSC is applying for a grant to help property owners with unimproved property abatement.

As we work through these changes, the active part of our fire year is starting early this year due to the drought conditions in most of California.

The need to provide fire abatement education and accomplishments is paramount this year. New owners need to understand their abatement responsibilities under Public Resource Code 4291. Information about the standards in 4291 is available from Cal Fire, Idyllwild Fire, the US Forest Service and MCFSC.

Cal Fire’s Ready-Set-Go program is a must read for all of us who live in the wildland urban interface (readyforwildfire.org/ready-set-go-campaign/). Having a plan prior to an emergency can be the difference between surviving or not.

The information in the previous two paragraphs will set you up to pass your fire inspection. However, living in a timber forest brings constant needle and leaf fall which is a major cause of structure loss during a wildfire. Roofs and decks that are allowed to accumulate pine needles can easily catch on fire from ember cast even when the main fire is ½ mile or more away! Ember cast can also ignite a fire on your property from a structure fire in your neighborhood. This is why PRC 4291 is a year-round law.

It takes more work to live on this mountain than it does to live in a housing tract in a city. There are advantages and disadvantages to both. However, if you choose to live here or own a property here, you must accept the extra responsibility of living in a forest. Increasing the odds of a home surviving a wildfire is the owners responsibility. Firefighters have to make hard choices when large numbers of homes are threatened with fire. The work you do or don’t do, will influence those choices.

If we can help you with your fire abatement needs, information on abatement or hardening of homes, please give us a call at 951-659-6208.

Norm Walker
President of the Board
Mountain Communities Fire Safe Council

**MCFSC Large Landscape Project**

Working with the Forestry and Fire Recruitment Program, this MCFSC project was a little bit different and quite a bit wonderful. A large landscape project, defensible space fuels reduction work was completed on two-twenty plus acre nonprofit properties in very high-risk areas. The first was the Calvary Chapel property, and the second was the Living Free Animal Sanctuary.

Funded by Edison International.

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**Photo credit: Kenzie Bruce, Blue Chalk Media**
Southern California Edison customers on the Tapo circuit in Simi Valley experienced four Public Safety Power Shutoff events between last November and December, affecting some, if not most, of the 1,374 customers on the circuit each time.

Under similar weather conditions and with the expedited grid hardening that SCE has initiated and targeted for completion by Oct. 1, before peak wildfire season, none of the PSPS outages likely would have occurred.

And the good news for customers is that it’s only one of more than 60 cities and unincorporated communities in high fire risk areas, ranging from Santa Clarita to Malibu to Fontana that should see a sharp reduction in the impacts of PSPS when SCE’s expedited upgrades are completed on the most frequently impacted circuits. The work will also increase reliability in general.

Terry Ohanian, SCE’s director of Grid Hardening, and the utility’s PSPS Readiness Team are laser focused on the PSPS Action Plan - Opens in new window to decrease the need for PSPS, a tool used as a last resort to protect public safety under dangerous weather conditions.

“We want to reduce the number of PSPS events, reduce the duration of PSPS events and reduce the number of customers who experience PSPS events,” said Ohanian, a 31-year SCE veteran and frequent incident commander on the utility’s PSPS Incident Management Teams. “It’s good news for our customers affected by PSPS.”

A deep-dive review of the areas most impacted by PSPS or those with four or more PSPS de-energizations since 2019 resulted in circuits feeding 80,000 customers being targeted for expedited grid hardening. Some of this work was originally scheduled for completion at the end of this year and next year, but will now be completed by October.

For starters, one-third of the approximately 700 miles of bare power lines previously scheduled to be replaced with insulated lines or covered conductor, by year’s end will be expedited to Oct. 1 along with at least 70 miles of new work. This will help eliminate the risk of an ignition when a tree branch or other debris blows into equipment during high winds and reduce the need for PSPS.

In addition, SCE will automate 18 remote-controlled switches and install seven new switches to allow more precision and de-energize smaller areas, install nine new weather stations and improve protocols to switch customers to nearby circuits unaffected by a shutoff, when possible.

“When we complete work on these circuits, we are currently estimating a 78% reduction in PSPS on them under weather conditions similar to last year,” said Ohanian of SCE’s backcast method that analyzed past weather conditions against the expedited upgrades. “This means that while 57,000 customers on these circuits experienced at least one PSPS outage last year, about 37,000 of these customers would not have experienced an outage after the expedited upgrades and, of the remaining 20,000, many of those would have seen fewer and/or shorter PSPS outages.”
US Forest Service

What happens when you drone during a fire

"There’s a drone in the area," a voice on the radio said. "All aircraft, hold your position outside the area." We all look up, squinting our eyes at a bright blue sky from the Cajon Pass. "There it is," said the battalion chief, pointing to an area above a hill. A quadcopter, with its four arms spread, hovered above the so-called Devore Fire. It was May 2021 and we all thought that the public knew that this was not allowed. How wrong we were.

That’s why each year, the public relations arms of wildland fire agencies put out educational messaging about flying drones during incidents. "If you fly, we can’t!" the posters say. But it’s still happening.

There were 21 documented reports of drone incursions in 2020, including during the 33,000-acre Apple Fire just across Interstate 10. And it happened on the San Bernardino National Forest before that, too: The 2016 Blue Cut Fire and 2015 Lake Fire, for example.

TFRs, or Temporary Flight Restrictions, are often put into place during major incidents to, in part, prohibit recreational drone usage. Even when no TFR is in effect, it is not allowed to interfere with the work of suppressing a fire. That follows Federal Aviation Administration policy and best practices to avoid mid-air collisions with firefighting aircraft, risks to on-the-ground firefighters and hampering the effectiveness of wildfire suppression operations.

Aerial firefighting aircraft, including air tankers, lead planes and helicopters, fly at very low altitudes, just hundreds of feet above the ground, and in the same airspace as drones. This creates the potential for a mid-air collisions and pilot distraction that may result is a serious or fatal accident.

When a drone is spotted in the area of a wildfire, fire managers may have to ground all aerial firefighting aircraft until they can confirm that the drone has left the area and they feel confident that the airspace is safe again. This can cause wildfires to become larger, more costly and to unduly threaten lives, property, and natural and cultural resources.

Individuals who have been determined to have endangered manned aircraft or people on the ground with a UAS and/or interfered with wildfire suppression may be subject to civil penalties, including fines of up to $25,000, and potentially criminal prosecution.

So if you have a drone, let’s keep it on the ground when that smoke starts rising. Leave the airspace to our brave pilots and air crew.

Zach Behrens is the Public Affairs Officer for the San Bernardino National Forest.
Defensible Space Project Work- Grant Funds on the Ground
By Katherine Garver, MCFSC Field Supervisor
Here is an example of project work conducted by the MCFSC. Grant Funds were utilized to assist a property owner to remove hazardous fuels surrounding the home. The removal of these dense fuels creates the necessary defensible space as required by PRC 4291.

Mountain Communities Fire Safe Council may have Grant Funds to Help You Prepare Your Property for Fire Season
We have been assisting residents living in the San Jacinto Mountain WUI for 19 years. We may be able to help you with your hazardous fuels abatement and dead tree removal. For more information on free abatement consultation, call 951-659-6208!

Court upholds Insurance Commissioner Lara’s order to expand FAIR Plan “last resort” coverage to better protect homeowners

LOS ANGELES — Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara issued the following statement after a California trial court upheld his authority to order the California FAIR Plan to offer broader coverage options to consumers who are increasingly losing their homeowners’ insurance due to the risk of wildfires:

“With insurance companies increasingly dropping their customers due to wildfire risk, homeowners depend on the FAIR Plan as the insurer of last resort for their coverage. The court ruling affirms my authority that the FAIR Plan must offer broader, more comprehensive insurance protection for consumers. In addition, by forcing its policyholders to purchase separate insurance policies for liability and contents on top of its “fire-only” policy, the FAIR Plan drives up the price for consumers, which only benefits the insurance companies that profit from this unfair and costly arrangement. California consumers win when they have greater options for insurance coverage, which is why I ordered the FAIR Plan to modernize its coverage 18 months ago. The FAIR Plan and the insurance companies who control it need to move forward to implement this needed coverage option as soon as possible, and I have directed my staff to work quickly to make sure this comprehensive coverage is available to all Californians.”

The National Weather Service is predicting a La Nina emerging this fall and lasting through the 2021-22 winter. This would mean that it is more critical than ever to conserve water, contact your local water district for more information.
Riverside County Fire Department (RCFD) was awarded a Forest Health grant through the CAL FIRE Forest Health Program as part of the California Climate Investments (CCI) program to assist in mitigating the damages caused by the Goldspotted Oak Borer (GSOB). The goal of the program is to identify GSOB infested oak trees, develop a strategy to either remove or treat them, provide educational material to the University of Riverside (UCR) and ultimately slow the outbreak and natural speed of the GSOB.

Due to the unprecedented impacts of Covid-19 in 2020, the RCFD Forest Health Program is currently undergoing a project modification to be able to start back up serving the community of Idyllwild regarding this invasive species. In the interim, RCFD will monitor the GSOB hotline and respond to individuals with request for treatment and/or removal of infested oaks on their property.

RCFD was also awarded grant funds through CAL FIRE California Climate Investments (CCI) Fire Prevention program for Dead, Dying, Diseased (DDD) Tree Removal. This program is currently available to property owners to assist in the mitigation of pine bark beetle as well GSOB infestations and contains a cost share component. Messages left on the GSOB hotline that may qualify for the DDD program will be forwarded to the RCFD contracted project manager.

Please call the GSOB hotline at 951-659-8328 for information and leave a detailed message if interested in participating in either program.

Melissa Curtis
Admin. Services Analyst II / County Finance - Grants
CAL FIRE/Riverside County Fire Department

Funding for this project provided by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection as part of the California Climate Investments Program

The Riverside County - Forest Health Project is part of California Climate Investments, a statewide program that puts billions of Cap-and-Trade dollars to work reducing GHG emissions, strengthening the economy, and improving public health and the environment – particularly in disadvantaged communities. The Cap-and-Trade program also creates a financial incentive for industries to invest in clean technologies and develop innovative ways to reduce pollution. California Climate Investments projects include affordable housing, renewable energy, public transportation, zero-emission vehicles, environmental restoration, more sustainable agriculture, recycling, and much more. At least 35 percent of these investments are located within and benefiting residents of disadvantaged communities, low-income communities, and low-income households across California. For more information visit the California Climate Investments website at: www.caclimateinvestments.ca.gov

A Message from Idyllwild Fire Department

If you are new to our incredible community, I would like to be among the first to welcome you and I’d also like to bring your attention to what our current residents already know. Fire prevention and property abatement of your privately owned property is your ongoing responsibility. Several ordinances which include Idyllwild Fire Protection District Ordinance 01-19 require the ongoing and continuous maintenance and abatement of your property which will help to ensure our combined success when fire incidents threaten our mountain plateau communities. Other ordinances for those living in the unincorporated areas of the San Jacinto mountain plateau such as Riv. Co. ordinance 695 also require this ongoing attention to property abatement. Your Fire service cooperators spend countless hours planning and working hard to ensure the very best of outcomes for life, property, and the environment during fire incidents across the nation, throughout the state and right here at home in your backyard. Please visit idyllwildfire.com for information pertaining to property abatement, hardening your home against wildfire, evacuation planning and safety, and other fire safety tips which will help you and your family to be better prepared. I’d like to thank all of our residents for their continued diligence and partnership in fire prevention and safety. Working together we will continue to enjoy this beautiful place we call home.

By Mark LaMont,
Fire Chief
Equipment Use Safety

Are You doing the right thing, the wrong way?
Are you doing the right thing the wrong way—for example, trying to eliminate the fire hazards around your home and in the process starting a wildland fire? Each year CAL FIRE responds to more than 1,600 fires started by Californians using equipment the wrong way.

Whether working to create a defensible space around your home, just mowing the lawn, or pulling your dirt bike over to the side of the road, if you live in a wildland area you need to use all equipment responsibly. Lawn mowers, weedeaters, chain saws, grinders, welders, tractors, and trimmers can all spark a wildland fire. Do your part, the right way, to keep your community fire safe.

Here’s how to do it the Right Way:
• Do all yard maintenance that requires a gas or electrical motor before 10 a.m. Not in the heat of the day, or when the wind is blowing!
• Lawn mowers are designed to mow lawns. Never use lawn mowers in dry vegetation.
• Use a weed trimmer to cut down dry weeds and grass.
• Remove rocks in the area before you begin operating any equipment. A rock hidden in grass or weeds is enough to start a fire when struck by a metal blade.
• In wildland areas, spark arresters are required on all portable gasoline powered equipment including tractors, harvesters, chain saws, weedeaters, mowers, motorcycles, and All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs).
• Keep the exhaust system, spark arresters and mower in proper working order and free of carbon build-up. Use the recommended grade of fuel and don’t top off.
• Keep the engine free of oil and dust, and keep the mower free of flammable materials.
• In wildland areas, a permit may be required for grinding and welding operations, and spark shields may be required on equipment. Be sure to have 10 feet of clearance, a 46” round point shovel, and a backpump water-type fire extinguisher ready to use.
• Hot exhaust pipes and mufflers can start fires you won’t even see, until it’s too late! Don’t pull off into dry grass or brush.
• Keep a cell phone nearby and call 911 immediately in case of a fire.

www.fire.ca.gov
Community Connections

If you have visited the Help Center, you may have noticed piles of wood in various stages of processing by MCFSC’s volunteer Woodies.

Thanks to the men and women who make up the group, big logs become smaller logs. Smaller logs become rounds or quarters which, eventually, become split firewood to be distributed to Help Center clients in need.

All the wood that ends up in the shed comes from a variety of sources. We have been very fortunate with community partners who share the same sense of service that we do. Pine Cove Water District has provided large amounts delivered right to the yard, Idyllwild Pines offered up a huge pile of trees that had been cut the prior year, tree service contractors (Pino, Pacific Slope and Pearson’s) and even private homeowners have all done their share of donations. None of this would be possible without these generous donors and all the individuals who work in the background to make it happen. As a result of these connections, 433 households were kept warm this winter.

Team Rubicon

For the second year in a row, we have had the pleasure of working with Team Rubicon, a group of volunteers, mostly veterans but some civilians, who deploy anywhere they are needed. Whether it be hurricane relief, vaccine clinics, fire recovery or virtually any disaster, chances are, T.R. will be there.

Their collaboration with Woodies in fire mitigation has been enormous help for our, ahem… aging team members. Doing the lion’s share of tree cutting, raking and hauling gave us the extra muscle we needed. This year presented an added challenge with an unprecedented heat wave that delayed the start of the week-long project. Even with slightly lower temperatures a few days later, Team Rubicon and Woodies worked through days of 90+ degree heat in dusty, dirty conditions but remained focused on making just one more home at little more fire safe.

Community partnering was essential in getting T.R.’s men and women housing for the duration of their stay. With most of the private camps finally opening up after a year and a half, finding housing for upwards of 30 people was probably the biggest challenge. All were very willing but were too full to accommodate this large influx. Again, Idyllwild Pines stepped up and figured out a way. In exchange for their housing, T.R. did tree work on the Idyllwild Pines campus using that work to train their up and coming sawyers and brush up the skills of their experienced cutters in preparation for hurricane relief deployment later in the year.

Many thanks to Team Rubicon and Idyllwild Pines for their cooperation and support.

Woodies are always looking for a few good people to round out our crew. If you can push a wheelbarrow, you can be a Woodie! If you want to “branch out” learning proper and safe skills in splitting or cutting, we can train you. Please contact the Fire Safe Council for more information and to connect with the Woodie’s coordinator.

To see if you qualify for the firewood donation program through the Help Center, please call the Help Center office at 951-659-3000.

For more information about Team Rubicon, go to https://teamrubiconusa.org/
For seventeen years I’ve had the privilege of working with the staff and crew of volunteers that make up the Mountain Communities Fire Safe Council. In 2003 I heard about the WOODIES who were working in both private and public lands removing dead and dying vegetation, raking flammable leaves and pine needles away from structures, abating properties and making our mountain communities safer.

I joined the Woodies and worked alongside these amazing volunteers, met my husband to be Ron Perry. As WOODIES we coordinated with The HELP Center and joined several other hard working individuals donating their time and energy hauling, sawing, splitting and stacking firewood for community members to use for heating their homes.

Together with Shelly Kibby at the Nature Center and Cal Fire, who coordinated efforts, we wrote, illustrated and published a brochure featuring the drought and fire resistant demonstration garden on the Nature Center Grounds. Under the direction of Cal Fire forestry experts and scientists from UCR we attended hours of training sessions learning about the tiny insects infesting and killing our majestic old Black Oaks -the Golden Spotted Oak Borers or GSOB. Our team of four WOODIES- the OAK A-TEAM- canvassed the forest, locating, observing, photographing and doing written documentation reporting our findings as Citizen Scientists to both CalFire and to the entomologists at UCR who with MCFSC facilitated awarding grants providing money for abatement efforts throughout the mountain communities including among others, Idyllwild, Pine Cove, Fern Valley, Mountain Center, as well as residents in the greater Pinyon area and Poppet Flats.

In addition to applying for and being awarded federal, state and other grant funds, MCFSC asked for financial help from our private residents and local businesses, but donations amounts were down. Noticing some successful fundraising formats, as a board member I suggested and devised a tiered donor system, the lowest tier named after the amazing soil dwelling organisms called mycorrhizae and the highest category the mighty Black Oaks. The strategy was quite successful bringing in more than triple what our worthwhile organization had been receiving. A proud achievement and a strategy that has continued throughout the continuing life of our MCFSC to this day.

I was honored to be a part of our MCFSC and miss participating in helping meet its mission and goals, most of all missing the people with whom I had the privilege to work.

Sweet and mighty Doris Lombard with ax.

MCFSC, the Woodies, and the Idyllwild community will miss you Doris!