

Defensible space prevents spread of wildfires

By Teri Mizuhara

The recent wildland fire in Diamond Springs is a compelling illustration of how well defensible space works. Homes surrounding the fire area were spared major damage due in part to a swatch around the perimeter that had been mowed earlier in the year.

his “defensible space” prevented the wildland fire from sweeping straight into many of the homes and the mobile home park.

Creating a buffer zone between your home and the wildland greatly reduces the risk of your home catching on fire from direct contact from the fire, radiant heat or flying embers. These embers can destroy homes and even entire neighborhoods that are located far from the actual flame front of a wildfire.

It is crucial to have your defensible space established around your home and every other structure on your property. Don't delay and start now if you haven't already begun to create defensible space around your structures.

But keep in mind that the vegetation is critically dry and even with a bit of rain, the combination of a little sun and wind will dry out the grasses/weeds and shrubs in no time flat so don't operate your gas powered equipment after 10am or before 7pm when humidity is at its lowest.

Here are some tips on achieving a defendable home and property:

Zone One extends up to 30 feet (or your property line

whichever is closer) from every structure on your property

- Remove all dead and dying vegetation
- Remove leaf litter from your roof and rain gutters
- Relocate woodpiles well away from your home
- Trim trees so that they are a minimum of 10 feet from your chimney and roof line
- Remove “ladder fuels” (low-level vegetation that could allow fire to spread from the ground to shrubs and bushes to the tree canopies).

Zone Two extends from 30 feet to 100 feet (or to your property line whichever is closer):

- The key is to keep plant material separated from each other both horizontally and vertically, this prevents the vegetation from acting like a ladder and allowing the fire to move from the ground to the tree canopies
- Cut annual grasses down to a maximum of 4 inches in height.

The following areas of your home should be checked annually and maintained as needed:

Check that your chimney has an approved spark arrestor (screen) in good condition covering the opening. The screen should have openings no smaller than three-eighths inch and no larger than one-half inch.

Keep the area under your deck or balcony free of combustible material. Never store your firewood under your deck.

Consider having multiple garden hoses that are long enough to reach any area of your home and any structure on your property.

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