

South Tahoe, Lake Valley fire on heightened alert

By Jeff Meston

The South Lake Tahoe Fire Department and Lake Valley Fire Protection District have joined in developing a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) for South Lake Tahoe.

A CWPP enables a community to plan how it will reduce the risk of wildfire. The plan identifies strategic sites and methods for fuel reduction projects across the landscape and jurisdictional boundaries.

We are asking the community to participate in a survey for developing the CWPP. Please complete the following survey.

A CWPP is a vehicle for incorporating the fire adapted community recommendations into community design and maintenance, and for taking communities to the next step in wildfire preparedness. CWPP planning assists communities in establishing priorities for protecting life, property and infrastructure. The plans can take a variety of forms, but at a minimum must:

- Be developed collaboratively.
- Identify and prioritize areas and methods for hazardous fuel-reduction treatments.
- Recommend measures to reduce the ignitability of structures throughout the community.

For more opportunities to learn about CWPP development, consider attending one of the following events:

- May 20 9am, South Lake Tahoe City Council meeting at 1901 Airport Road, South Lake Tahoe

- May 22 5-7pm,CWPP public input meeting at 1901 Airport Road, South Lake Tahoe, airport conference room.

In addition, South Lake Tahoe Fire Department will implement a program this year to help inform and educate citizens on when the weather adds to our existing fire danger. The 2014 fire season could be catastrophic with our drought conditions and we need our citizens' help. Fire crews will monitor the National Weather Service and when the weather reaches a red flag warning, we will implement the following procedures.

We will raise a red flag at each fire station to inform the public.

We will add extra personnel to staff a Type 3 (brush) engine for an aggressive fire attack. The personnel assigned to the engine will patrol our highest fire danger areas. The staffed engine will have a red flag banner to help alert the community. The banner will say "Red Flag Day- Critical Fire Weather".

When citizens see these indicators of the additional fire danger within our community they should be especially mindful of the following:

- Avoid outdoor burning, such as campfires, or any other open flame. Even grilling is not advised when red flag days exist.
- Dispose of cigarettes and other smoking materials into fire safe containers. Tossing smoldering cigarettes onto the ground should never occur.
- Properly store flammable materials such as gasoline, alcohol, paint, lighter, and matches. These materials may reach their critical points during hot weather and can possibly result in fire.
- Be extremely careful when using and fueling chain saws, lawn mowers, weed eaters and other lawn care equipment. High heat

conditions make ignition of the fuel vapors more likely. Find shade if possible and allow the machinery to cool if it has been running. Also avoid welding in dangerously dry conditions, as the sparks can easily ignite the dry vegetation around you.

- Be careful where you park your vehicles. The hot underside of a car or truck filled with gasoline parked over dead grass or leaves is an explosion waiting to happen. Be sure to park on concrete or solid dirt or gravel, especially during red flag days. Do not park where vegetation touches the vehicle.

Jeff Meston is fire chief of South Lake Tahoe. Martin Goldberg, with Lake Valley Fire, contributed to this story.