

Defensible space even more critical in dry year

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

CalFire will begin defensible space inspections Monday in Amador County and on the West Slope of El Dorado County.

“Hopefully people have been working on their defensible space this spring as it has been a relatively dry one,” Kelly Keenan, chief of CalFire’s Amador-El Dorado Unit, said in a written statement. “With the strong potential for drought this year, it is critical that everyone get to work today to give their home the best chance of surviving a wildfire.”



Proper defensible space spared this house in the Angora burn area. Photo/Lake Valley Fire

In an area extending 30 feet from each structure on the property, or to the property line, whichever is closer, fire officials advise people to:

- Remove all dead and dying vegetation.
- Remove leaf litter from the roof and rain gutters.

- Relocate wood piles well away from the home.
- Trim trees so that they are at least 10 feet from the chimney and roof line.
- Remove “ladder fuels”, low-level vegetation that could allow fire to spread from the ground to shrubs and bushes, and to tree canopies.

In the area extending between 30 and 100 feet from structures, or to the property line, officials say 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 fire to move from the ground to tree canopies. Annual grasses should be cut so that they are no more than 4 inches high.

Residents also are advised to:

- Check the chimney to make sure it has an approved spark arrestor, or screen, covering the opening and that it is in good condition. The screen should have openings no smaller than three-eighths of an inch and no larger than a half-inch.
- Keep the area under decks and balconies free of combustible material. Never store firewood under a deck.
- Consider having multiple garden hoses that are long enough to reach any area and any other structure on the property.

For more detailed information, see CalFire’s Ready-Set-Go website or call (530) 644.2345 to request a free brochure.