

Opinion: Time to prepare for wildfire

By Lake Tahoe Basin Fire Agencies

With record drought conditions in the West, preparing your home for wildfire is more important than ever. May has been designated Wildfire Awareness Month in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

This year's theme is Prepare Your Home For Wildfire, with a focus on creating and sustaining fire adapted communities.

A fire adapted community is a community located in a fire-prone area that requires little assistance from firefighters during a wildfire. Residents of these communities accept responsibility for living in a high fire-hazard area.

They possess the knowledge and skills to:

- Prepare their homes and property to survive wildfire.
- Evacuate early, safely and effectively.
- Survive, if trapped by wildfire.

As part of this year's theme, the Tahoe basin fire chiefs are encouraging residents to work with their local fire districts and host neighborhood block parties during May and throughout the summer. These parties create an opportunity for neighbors to get to know each other, meet their fire district and agency representatives and learn what it means to become a fire adapted community.

"We have to shift our way of thinking from being reactionary about protecting our homes once a wildfire starts, and instead, start proactively preparing our homes to survive a wildfire before one begins," said Fire Chief Gareth Harris of Lake Valley Fire Protection District. "When whole communities

work together for this goal, they become fire-adapted.”

Things you can do to become more fire adapted include:

- Talk to your local fire department about how to prepare for a wildfire, situational awareness before a fire, when to evacuate, and what you and your community should expect during a response.
- Your local fire department to conduct a risk assessment on your property.
- Create a plan to address issues in your property’s defensible space zone, including:
 - Maintaining a noncombustible area around the perimeter of your home;
 - Managing vegetation along fences;
 - Clearing debris from decks and patios, eaves, and porches;
 - Selecting proper landscaping and plants;
 - Knowing the local ecology and fire history;
 - Moving radiant heat sources away from the home (i.e., wood piles, fuel tanks, sheds);
 - Thinning trees and ladder fuels around the home
- Develop a personal and family preparedness plan.
- Support land management agencies by learning about wildfire risk reduction efforts, such as using prescribed fire to manage local landscapes.