

Opinion: Safety comes with fire adapted communities

By Ed Smith and Elwood Miller

A fire adapted community is one where the people have joined together to adequately prepare themselves and their homes for the occurrence of wildfire. They share the goal of mutual protection and creating a community that can survive wildfire with little or no assistance from firefighters. They perceive their community as vulnerable and constantly think about and discuss the threat of wildfire while individually and collectively taking action to mitigate the threat.

Residents of fire adapted communities:

- Acknowledge that their community is vulnerable to the destructive force of wildfire.
- Understand those landscape and structural characteristics that increase the probability of ignition.
- Understand the limitations of fire suppression efforts and accept responsibility for preparing their home through pre-fire activities.
- Understand the importance of a fuel break where firefighters, when available, can safely defend life and property.
- Are knowledgeable about how weather, topography and fuels influence wildfire behavior.
- Work with their neighbors and the local fire service to develop a community action plan that details high priority needs and projects (e.g., Community Wildfire Protection Plan).

- Routinely assess their house in terms of vulnerability to wildfire and take corrective action.
- Actively communicate about the wildfire threat and promote actions necessary to reduce the threat within the community.
- Share their knowledge and perspective with newcomers to the community.
- Understand that they share their level of wildfire risk with their neighbors (i.e., if one house is inadequately prepared, the risk to the whole neighborhood increases.)
- Know that mitigating the wildfire threat to their homes is not a one-time effort, but must be ongoing.

Creating a fire adapted community is an ongoing process that requires acceptance of a real wildfire threat and a collective determination to increase community survival by reducing that threat. Take that first step in becoming a fire adapted community today by talking to your local fire service, or contacting us at millere@unce.unr.edu or going online.

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