



The LOOKOUT

FIRE SAFETY INFORMATION TO KEEP OUR FORESTS HEALTHY AND YOUR PROPERTY SAFE



DEADLINE FOR MARKING DEAD TREES APPROACHES

Time is running out. Mountain-area property owners with dead, dying or diseased trees on their property have until June 30, 2007, to get their trees marked for removal through the San Bernardino County Hazardous Tree Abatement Program.

The program has significantly reduced the potential for catastrophic wildfires. But the \$70 million in funding from the federal government is due to expire at the end of the year.

Property owners may contact the San Bernardino County Hazardous Tree Abatement Program at (909) 867-1240. Under the tree abatement program, Mountain Area Safety Taskforce (MAST) member agencies have removed more than one million trees over the past five years. Participants in the tree removal program include the County of San Bernardino, San Bernardino County Fire, CAL FIRE, the U.S. Forest Service, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Caltrans, and Southern California Edison.

"Property owners need to act now, if they want assistance with tree removal," said Assistant Chief Peter Brierty of the San Bernardino County Fire Department.

Prolonged drought has left the forests in the San Bernardino Mountains in a weakened state and suffering from the bark beetle infestation, which continues to kill vast numbers of

trees. MAST, in association with the county fire department, is spearheading the effort to restore the health of the forest and make it more fire resistant by removing dead, dying and diseased trees from areas especially vulnerable to wildfire.

"We do not want a repeat of the catastrophic 2003 Grand Prix and Old fires," Brierty said.

MAST is also shifting its program focus from the removal of dead, dying and diseased trees to thinning live trees, also known as "green fuel," to promote a healthy forest and further reduce the potential for a catastrophic fire.

While the response from property owners to MAST's wildfire prevention efforts has been overwhelmingly positive, many people do not understand the need to remove live trees. The problem fire protection officials face is that not only do live trees burn, the forest is overstocked, with more than 100 to 200 trees per acre, where a healthy forest has 40 to 60 trees per acre. Thinning live trees not only reduces the fire danger, it also frees up resources for the remaining trees, making them healthier, restoring their vigor and making them more resistant to bark beetle infestation.

This does not mean property owners have to clear their land. To achieve the healthy forest goal, only low-value live trees need to be removed. Officials say that typically these are



Officials celebrate the felling of the one-millionth dead tree as part of the San Bernardino County Hazardous Tree Abatement Program.

saplings and trees 8 to 10 inches in diameter or less.



Moreover, thinning live trees also helps property owners create a defensible space around their homes, where officials recommend trees be spaced 20 to 30 feet apart, depending on the ground slope and other factors.

"A thinner forest is a healthier forest, and a healthier forest is a fire-resistant forest," Brierty said.

CASE STUDY › THIN IS IN: TAKING OUT 'GREEN FUEL'

Phil and Sandy Browne own three adjoining lots, totalling about 1½ acres, in the Angelus Oaks region of the San Bernardino Mountains.

A portion of their property lies on a steep slope rising out of a riparian canyon where the brush cannot be cleared. In the event of a fire, the canyon could create a "chimney effect," driving the fire toward the enclave of houses above. This area is considered vulnerable by fire protection officials. The property was heavily timbered with cedar, oak, spruce and pine.

In 2004, the Brownes thinned the timber and cleared undergrowth on the upper portion of their property as far as the drop-off. But because of the steep slope on the drop-off, the remainder was untouched. In addition, the Brownes were reluctant to have any more live trees removed.

THE PLAN: After hearing about the Forest Care program sponsored by CAL FIRE and the San Bernardino National Forest Association, the Brownes chose to participate. Under the program, qualified property owners are reimbursed up to 75 percent of the cost of removing live trees ("green fuel").

A forester identified trees and brush that needed to be removed, then the Brownes obtained bids from private contractors and selected one to perform the work last year.

For More Information, Contact:

FOREST CARE
(888) 883-THIN

THE RESULT: The Brownes paid \$4,100 for 110 small to medium-sized trees (up to 12 inches in diameter) to be removed. They also paid "a little extra" to have the wood cut into smaller pieces and to have some fallen trees removed. The Brownes were reimbursed \$3,075 by the Forest Care Program, reducing their out-of-pocket expense to \$1,025.

Despite their initial reluctance to take out any more trees, the Brownes are glad they did it. "The forest was too thick," Phil Browne acknowledged. "We like it better now. It opened things up a bit and it also helps with fire protection. We are pleased with the result."

BE PREPARED TO EVACUATE

The potential for a large, damaging fire in the heavily populated mountain forest is severe due to long-term drought and insect-infected trees. Because wildfires can spread faster than anyone can run or even drive, mountain residents and visitors alike need to be ready to evacuate within four to six hours notice.

Being prepared means having an emergency plan and meeting with family members to discuss the dangers of fire and other emergencies. Learn alternate ways out of your neighborhood in case the usual way out becomes blocked. It is critical to be familiar with all the main arteries up and down the mountain. Also, be aware of emergency plans for your child's school or day care center, and discuss how to respond to each disaster that may occur.

Prepare an evacuation checklist and organize the items to be taken during an evacuation. Remember the 4 Ps:

- PICTURES — family photos and albums
- PAPERS — important personal documents regarding home ownership, insurance, credit cards, cash, etc; and don't forget your eyeglasses or jewelry
- PRESCRIPTIONS — all medications you will need for several days
- PETS — include food and water, and consider putting them in cages

Prepare an evacuation route map with at least two routes and drive the routes in advance of an actual emergency. Visit the MAST website for a Mountain Area Emergency Route map of your area: www.calmast.org.

Taking part in the Forest Care program, Phil and Sandy Browne were able to make their home more fire-resistant by thinning the live trees on their property.

