

SPRING CLEANING: A CHECKLIST FOR MAKING YOUR PROPERTY FIRE-SAFE

The annual rite of spring cleaning is not just for inside your home. Winter storms typically leave downed tree limbs, leaves and pine needles in their wake, and winter rains give rise to a variety of weeds and grasses that die with the onset of warm, dry weather in late spring.

This dead vegetation constitutes a significant fire hazard and needs to be removed to maintain a defensible space around your home and other structures. You may also want to improve your landscaping with drought-tolerant, fire-resistant plants. Here's a spring-cleaning checklist to help you make your property more fire-safe.

REMOVE DEAD VEGETATION

- Remove tree limbs, dead branches still attached to plants, dropped leaves and needles.
- Remove all pine needles and leaves from beneath decks and within two feet of any structure. In all other locations, where pine needles cover bare soil and downed trees are embedded in the ground, they should be removed to a thickness of between one and two inches. This helps reduce erosion, conserve water and maintain a healthy forest.

CUT TALL GRASSES AND WEEDS

- Grass should not exceed four inches in height. In situations where these fuels are isolated from other fuels or where necessary to stabilize soil, grasses and similar vegetation may reach a height of 18 inches.
- Trim or remove ground fuels greater than four inches high. Single specimens of trees or other vegetation may be kept if they are well-spaced, well-pruned and create an overall condition that avoids the spread of fire to other vegetation or to structures.

ELIMINATE LADDER FUELS

- Ladder fuels include plants or vegetation that allow flames to climb upward like rungs of a ladder into the tree branches above them. Remove the lower fuel layers, such as tall shrubs or small trees, in addition to other low-lying debris beneath trees.
- Raise the height of the upper fuel layer by removing lower tree branches to a height of 6 feet.
- Clearance between shrubs should be 4 to 40 feet depending on the slope of the land and size and type of vegetation.



Remove ladder fuel to keep from creating a crown fire.

FIRE-SAFE PLANTING

- Consider replacing lawn with low-water-use ground cover and shrubs.
- Do not plant lawns or other high-water-use plants around the base of trees.
- Keep a mix of plant species with varying ages to lessen the chances of severe insect or disease problems and provide better wildlife habitats.
- For a list of recommended trees, shrubs, flowers and ground cover, see "A Landscape Guide for Mountain Homes." To get your copy, call (909) 337-8555 or visit www.calmast.org.

PROPERTY OWNERS TAKE FIRE PREVENTION STEPS, SURVEY SHOWS

Eighty-nine percent of respondents to a recent telephone survey of mountain-area residents and property owners said they had taken steps to protect their property in case of a wildfire. The survey was conducted by San Bernardino County and the Mountain Area Safety Taskforce (MAST) in late December 2006 and early January 2007.

The survey respondents also gave high marks for some of MAST's programs, with 90 percent ranking the education program as "very" or "somewhat" effective and 96 percent said the tree removal program was "very" or "somewhat" effective.

The County and MAST surveyed residents and property owners in the San Bernardino and San Gabriel Mountains to assess their level of fire safety awareness.

According to fire officials, while these results are encouraging, they also show there is still work to be done.

More than 500 mountain property owners participated in the random survey, including residents, non-residents and business owners. Of those, 86 percent said they had cleared brush within 30 feet of their home and structures, or within 100 feet if on a hillside, while 84 percent of the respondents said they had removed dead or dying trees.

These were all important goals of the MAST education program that, over the last five years, was aimed at removing trees killed by bark beetles, reducing fire danger and educating the public about what preventive measures they can take to protect their property from catastrophic wildfires.

During the five-year campaign, roughly one million dead or dying trees were removed with technical assistance and \$70 million in grants from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, as well as other sources. But a new concern has come to light. As the survey noted, only 39 percent of respondents said they had thinned live trees on their land and only 56 percent were aware that trees should be spaced 20 - 30 feet apart. In response to these findings, the campaign will continue with a new goal in mind: educating people about the need to thin the live trees, or "green fuel," on their property.

The survey results indicate the MAST education program has been successful, but there is still work to be done.

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