

FIREBRAND

WINTER 2012

PUBLISHED BY THE ROGUE VALLEY FIRE PREVENTION COOPERATIVE



Even the **BEST IDEAS** Have to Pay Their Own Way These Days



Nearly everyone agrees that Southern Oregon forests need to be thinned to reduce the danger of catastrophic wildfire and restore forest health. But the work is expensive, whether it's done by spendy machines or people walking over steep ground with chainsaws. In the past, much of the money for thinning came from state or federal grants, but that pool of cash is drying up. If thinning and fuel reduction will ever be done on a scale large enough to make a difference in overall forest health, the work will have to pay for itself.

The trick is to find a market for the wood fiber that small trees provide, and people all over Southern Oregon are looking for ways that fuel reduction and thinning can make money. Some are milling small logs into lumber, or harvesting poles for building fences and barns.



Others are burning logging slash and wood fiber to generate electricity or heat buildings. Some are transforming what used to be waste into wood pellets or blocks that can be burned for fuel.

The intent is to have healthy forests and put people to work at the same time. It's a laudable goal, but one

that's not easily achieved. The market for wood fiber is global. The price that Asian buyers pay for wood chips can determine whether the fiber makes jobs here or abroad. Transportation costs also have a huge influence on the market. When the price of diesel fuel rises, truckers can't drive as far into the woods to haul out thinned trees, and some material goes to waste.

The current economic slump hasn't helped, says George McKinley, director of the Southern Oregon Small Diameter Cooperative. It's a nonprofit organization that's committed to encouraging the removal of small trees on federal timberlands to improve forest health and strengthen local communities.

"The market the last few years has not been much help in advancing forest management," he says. "The lack of a good market is our primary challenge right now."

Market volatility complicates the picture.

"With any project, there's a whole constellation of (forest) products, the economics of which fluctuate daily," says Kevin Preister. Trained as an anthropologist, Preister is working with the Josephine County Stewardship Group to identify areas that could be suitable for thinning and fuel reduction on a "landscape" scale – say, a whole watershed instead of a few hundred acres.

People who have studied the region's forests say the volume of small-diameter wood that's available is vast by any measure.

"One of the things I've found about numbers, is that pretty much however you ask the question (about how much material there is), the numbers are just huge," McKinley says. He cautions, however, that big numbers aren't always helpful. "We're trying to keep the conversation focused on what the forest needs to be healthy. Numbers are an unhelpful tool in our toolbox."

The Small Diameter Cooperative worked with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and local people in the Applegate Valley to develop a 900-acre project that includes 250 acres of thinning in a timber sale called Pilot Joe and brush removal on 650 acres. Trees marked for cutting will be less than 150 years old, and most will be no larger than 16 inches in diameter at chest height.

McKinley says the project goal is to preserve the largest trees, improve forest health, produce wood for local mills, and reduce wildfire danger. He notes that the Pilot Joe timber sale was not challenged by environmental activists, and could provide a model for larger restoration projects in the future.

Preister has been talking with people in Josephine County's Illinois Valley to get a sense of what kinds of projects a majority of local folks would support. He's looking for ways to avoid the court challenges and legal battles that were so common over the past 20 years on federal forestlands.

After talking with 100s of people, Preister says he's discovered a surprisingly large "moderate middle" – a mainstream that supports removing trees to improve forest health, along with forest management that's science-based.

Meanwhile, people who are pursuing ways to turn waste wood into dollar bills

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Electrical fires claim the lives of 485 Americans each year and injure 2,305 more. Some of these fires are caused by electrical system failures and appliance defects. Many more are caused by the misuse and poor maintenance of electrical appliances, incorrectly installed wiring and overloaded circuits and extension cords.

The Cause

Electrical Wiring

- Most electrical fires result from problems with "fixed wiring" such as faulty electrical outlets and old wiring.
- Other electrical fires can be traced to misuse of electric cords, such as overloading circuits, poor maintenance and running the cords under rugs or in high traffic areas.

Home Appliances

- The home appliances most often involved in electrical fires are stoves and ovens, dryers, central heating units, televisions and radios.

Safety Precautions

- Frayed wires can cause fires. Replace all worn, old or damaged appliance cords immediately.
- Keep electrical appliances away from wet floors and counters; pay special care to electrical appliances in the bathroom and kitchen.
- Don't allow children to play with or around electrical appliances like space heaters, irons and hair dryers.
- Keep clothes, curtains and other potentially combustible items at least three feet from all heaters.
- Never overload extension cords or wall sockets. Immediately shut off, then professionally replace, light switches that are hot to the touch and lights that flicker. Use safety closures to "child-proof" electrical outlets.

Finally, having a working smoke alarm dramatically increases your chances of surviving a fire. And remember to practice a home escape plan frequently with your family.

All information found at: www.usfa.fema.gov. ■



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FUEL REDUCTION SAVES STRUCTURES IN NORTH RIVER ROAD FIRE

On August 18th, around 4:20p.m., a string of small grass fires broke out along the north bound side of Interstate 5 just outside of Rogue River, contributing to the growth of two individual fires. The first fire burned east of Rogue River up the south side of Tin Pan Peak and grew to an estimated 565 acres before containment on August 20. The second fire near Foothill Blvd was stopped on August 18, at 2.5 acres. The specific cause of these fires is still unknown but it has been determined that they were started by a vehicle.

Residents in the area of North River Rd. (where the 565-acre fire originated) were advised to evacuate their homes and stage at the Rogue Valley Elementary. They were to return when their homes were out of immediate danger. Three outbuildings and one vehicle were consumed by the fire and, fortunately, no homes were lost.

Fuel reduction plays a vital role in protecting people, property, and resources from the threat of wildfire. Fires are affected by fuel, weather, and topography; of these three, only fuels can be humanly altered. When we look at vegetation there are three different categories that contribute to the spread of wildfire, including surface, ladder and crown fuels. Surface fuels include ground debris and any low-growing vegetation, such as leaves, dead branches, grass, etc. On the other hand, ladder fuels are anything that can carry a fire from the surface to the crowns of trees, for example tall brush and low-hanging limbs. Lastly, crown fuels are the tops or canopies of trees. Another factor to consider are firebrands. Firebrands are burning embers such as leaves and pinecones, which can be carried by strong winds up to one mile away from the original fire. Firebrands put many homes at risk during a wildfire.

The fires in Rogue River threatened many homes; however, two areas were successful in preventing loss of structures by previous fuel reduction treatment. The first area was located at the bottom of Tin Pan Peak at the State Parks Department office. Fuel reduction treatment was done this spring by a brushing crew from the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF). The work was funded under the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008 Title III grant monies. This area was severely overgrown with vegetation, with an abundance of ladder fuels, blackberries and a tight canopy.

The Oregon Department of Forestry worked with Anna Krug, Park Manager of the Valley of the Rogue Management Unit, to develop a plan to mitigate the fire hazards around the property. A 150ft fuel break was established along the south and west boundaries of the property line. This was accomplished by thinning firs and other trees to a healthy 10-12 ft spacing and eliminating ladder fuels (such as blackberries and other highly flamma-

ble vegetation). The same protocol was followed to establish a 100ft defensible space perimeter around the office buildings.

Krug was working the day the North River Rd fire started, "It was pretty amazing to watch the fire come up and over the hill behind the shop yard and to see how quickly it moved." Fortunately an emergency procedure plan had already been established prior to the fire. Staff were well organized when they had received the evacuation notice and moved some of their equipment and supplies to the church parking lot below the office, at the base of the fire. They proceeded to Valley of the Rogue Park where they assisted with camper communications, and emergency procedures.

Without the fuel reduction work around the Parks Department Office, the outcome could have resulted in destruction of property. It also helped that the office had an existing sprinkler system surrounding the structures. "With the fuels reduction project from the spring, and our small fire suppression system behind the shop and office, we were positioned about as good as we could be for the fire," stated Krug.

The second, smaller fire consuming 2.5 acres was also started on the east side of Interstate 5. Rogue River Mobile Estates resides above the slope that the fire quickly crept up towards. Manager of the Rogue River Mobile Estates, Fred Boettcher, wasn't naive to the fire danger in the area. In fact, earlier in the year he received a \$400 grant from the ODF to perform fuels reduction on the southwest section of the estate. If it wasn't for the diligence and the forethought of Boettcher, the land surrounding and its homes could have been destroyed. Boettcher would like to continue the fuels reduction further west on his property later on this winter. He has also installed a new pumping system centrally located on his property, in the event of another fire in the area. "We would like to keep everyone as safe as possible. I know that the fuels in this area ignite quickly and fire can spread fast," said Boettcher. Even before he knew that grants were available in assisting in the fuels mitigation efforts, he and his maintenance staff mowed and limbed up trees in the vacant lot in front of the estates. "It is not always an easy job, it needs to be mowed and trimmed many times a year," said Boettcher. Boettcher's thinking was confirmed when a home, only 15ft away from the fire, was stopped due to fuels treatment. "We don't want to see anyone lose their home to a fire, and I will continue to do everything I can to make sure that it won't happen," stated Boettcher.

Remember that fuels are something that can easily be altered to change the behavior of a fire. It not only reduces your wildfire threat but it can also add aesthetic value. If you are unsure where

to begin, an ODF representative can perform an assessment of your property. Free assessments are available by calling (541) 664-3328. Also, you may

call the same number to see if you are eligible to receive a rebate to offset the costs of the fuel reduction around your home. ■
~ Teresa Burkhardt



The State Parks Department buildings in relation to the fire perimeter.

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The *Firebrand's* editorial content supports the mission of RVFPC, and the outreach and education action items in the Jackson County Integrated Fire Plan and the Josephine County Integrated Fire Plan. Articles also highlight projects that protect homes and wildlands from wildfire, and promote healthy, productive wildland environments.

The *Firebrand* also supports emergency preparedness for families, pets and livestock, and provides information about preventing fires inside the home.

Support YOUR community. Become a fire department volunteer today!

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To find out more about RVFPC and fire prevention, please visit us online at www.rvfpc.com, and on Facebook at "Rogue Valley Fire Prevention Cooperative."



Recognized Firewise Communities/USA in Jackson and Josephine Counties

Firewise Communities were established to assist in protecting landowners who live in the wildland-urban interface, who are isolated from fire stations and are often surrounded by flammable vegetation. Firewise offers landowners in fire-prone areas an opportunity to implement Firewise practices specifically tailored to their communities' needs. Doing this will reduce the community's vulnerability and survivability during a wildfire.



Creating defensible space around the home will reduce the risk of wildfire.

Five steps in creating a Firewise Community

1. Obtain a wildfire risk assessment as a written document from your state forestry agency or fire department.

This assessment will depict what the wildfire risk hazards are in your community. Learning about the vegetation, topography and potential for wildfire in the area is key to the start of this process.

2. Form a board or committee, and create an action plan based on the assessment.

Once you have the community's wildfire risk assessment completed, the community will need to form a local action plan. A Firewise Board or Committee will need to monitor the progress and development of the plan.

3. Conduct a Firewise Day event.

Firewise events can be fun and a great way to collaborate with other neighbors and fire agencies. The community and the Firewise Board can decide what type of event they want to hold. It can be anything from a neighborhood clean-up day to presenting a display at a local fair.

4. Invest a minimum of \$2 per capita in local Firewise actions for the year.

Investing in local Firewise events proves that your community takes wildfire safety seriously. The minimum of \$2 per capita may seem like a big goal for a small community; however, most neighborhoods not only reach their goals, but often exceed them.



A firewise clean-up day can consist of removing fire vulnerable vegetation around the home or holding an educational meeting.

5. Submit an application to your state Firewise liaison.

Now that your neighborhood, small town or subdivision has met the program criteria, you are ready to apply for national recognition as a Firewise Communities/USA site.



A Firewise Communities recognition ceremony, held in Ashland, Oregon.

There are three areas in Jackson and Josephine counties that have incorporated Firewise communities into their neighborhoods. With over 700 Firewise Communities in 40 states, landowners in fire-prone areas are making the changes necessary to protect themselves from wildfire.

Shady Cove has been the pioneer for Firewise Communities in Jackson County, receiving recognition for two Firewise Communities in 2009. They have held community clean-up days and have partnered with their local fire district to promote their events. On November 19, the Shady Cove fire district assisted in another Firewise event at the Shady Cove station. Garbage cans and a shredder were FREE to the public to dispose of vegetation and other debris. This fulfilled

their requirement of holding an annual Firewise event for their recertification.

In addition, Shady Cove has received Title III grants monies to assist in hiring a Firewise coordinator designation for the rest of Shady Cove area. Until a coordinator is hired, Shady Cove fire district firefighters will be trained on how to perform home assessments on future Firewise areas.

Ashland has been a big player in creating Firewise communities since the tragedy of the Oak Knoll Fire in 2010, destroying 11 residences. The Ashland Firewise coordinator, Ali True, has established 6 communities this year alone, and is looking to establish three more by the end of 2011.

True has hosted Firewise home assessment training sessions and is looking to incorporate a Firewise team teaching day in elementary schools around Jackson and Josephine counties. In addition, the Ashland Firewise Commission is currently working on coordinating a citywide Firewise day for next spring, 2012. For more information about these types of events and

trainings, visit the Ashland Firewise Facebook and Twitter pages.

Facebook page:

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Ashland-Firewise/215381655142137>

Twitter page:

<http://twitter.com/#!/AshlandFirewise>

Lastly, Grants Pass has identified 18 areas in the interface as potential Firewise Community projects. Title III funds were awarded to hire a Firewise coordinator for the area; an announcement of hire should be made in late October. Once the hiring process is complete, Grant Pass is excited to begin the Firewise Communities process.

The Grants Pass Fire Department will present the proposal for the Firewise grant to the City Council next month. The timetable would include two years of Title III funding for the Firewise coordinators position.

For more information about Firewise and what it can offer your neighborhood, visit their website at www.firewise.org. ■

~ Ashley DuBrey

Ideas — *continued from page 1*

say their efforts are often frustrated by a lack of adequate financing and their inability to get noticed by large corporations.



In Kerby, southwest of Grants Pass, Jim Walmsley is looking for an investor who could help him get environmental certification for the wood fire logs he wants to make. Walmsley uses machines made in Europe that form wood chips under pressure into brick-shaped blocks that burn hotter and cleaner than cord wood. He says he's invested \$300,000 already and has commitments from major retailers to sell the blocks, but they need an analysis of the smoke before they'll commit.

Walmsley says investors haven't been eager to jump into something as pedestrian as blocks of firewood, even hi-tech firewood.

"It's just a good old blue collar industry," he says. "It doesn't attract the right kind of investor, but it's just good stewardship if you can thin out the forest and help the remaining trees grow better."

In nearby Selma, Yvonne Company has struggled to sell her Oregon FireLogs — blocks of premium firewood made from madrone, one of the region's most common hardwoods. Her dad, Charlie Valdez, developed a process for transforming madrone logs into clean, wood-stove-sized blocks.

"It's kind of like a big French fry cutter," she says.

The process produces immaculately clean firewood that's packaged in cardboard boxes.

"It's not for someone who wants a cord of firewood for their home," Company says, but rather for people

who make a fire in their fireplace now and then, or want to make a campfire on vacation without scrounging for wood.

Anyone who has ever loaded a woodstove with madrone knows it burns long and hot, but Company has been unable to get the attention of big retailers who are already selling firewood products such as Duraflame that have national brand-name recognition.



The global economy also plays a role. In White City, Biomass One has burned waste wood for years to generate electricity, but the rising cost of wood chips means less wood is available at a price the company can afford. Historically, Biomass used the wood in slash piles at logging sites and for generating power. Now that same material is being sold for chips at a price Biomass can't afford, says Gordon Draper, company vice president.

Petroleum prices influence the market, too. When diesel fuel gets more expensive, truckers can't go as far into the woods for low-value wood. Draper says drivers who used to go 75 to 100 miles for logging slash can't go much farther than 50 or 60 miles at the current cost for diesel. He says Biomass can't simply raise prices for the electricity it generates, because the price is set by a contract with PacifiCorp. To make matters worse, he says the company's contract with PacifiCorp expires at the end of the year, "and the prices we're being offered are miserable."

McKinley says it's critical to preserve the few existing lumber mills that remain in the region. "A lot of our effort is to remind people how important that infrastructure is," he says. "If we lose it, they're not going to build new mills." ■

~ Bill Kettler

Open Burning Safety Tips

Reducing flammable fuels and vegetation around your home is the best way to protect your property from losses due to a wildfire. Once you complete fuel reduction activities there are several options for woody debris disposal. Recycling of wood wastes through composting, drop-off recycling centers, and chipping woody debris on-site are each becoming more common occurrences. These options utilize the full potential of the wood resource many landowners have on their properties. When wood recycling is not feasible, open burning of woody debris is an alternative for some rural landowners.

Prior to burning any woody debris on your property there are a few things

to consider. First, no open burning is allowed during fire season. When burning is allowed, **only burn wood wastes**. Never burn wet leaves, grass clippings, tires, plastic, or any garbage. Wet leaves and grass give off excessive smoke when burned becoming a nuisance. Burning trash gives off toxic fumes that create health hazards for residents.

In many areas of Southwest Oregon, factors such as local topography, wind speed, and population create the need for debris burning prohibitions and restrictions. Normally, no open burning of any kind is allowed between November 1st and February 28th inside the Medford-Ashland Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) of Jackson County. During these cold winter months the dense, cool air remains low to the valley floor. This contrib-

utes to poor ventilation and causes the stagnant, polluted air to be trapped at ground level, according to Wayne Kauzlarich, Natural Resource Specialist with the Oregon Dept. of Environmental Quality (DEQ). Open burning is also not allowed within the city limits of Jacksonville, Medford, Phoenix, Ashland, and areas of Central Point within Jackson County. In Josephine County, open burning is normally prohibited within the city limits of Grants Pass. Landowners that are unsure if their property is within a no-burn area can contact the nearest DEQ office, county environmental health office, or your local fire protection district to see if burning is allowed in your area.

Open Burning Tip #1 - Is this a burn day?



For landowners choosing to burn located within areas where burning is allowed, there are a few simple safety tips to follow. **Contact your local burn line daily before you burn.** Jackson County Burn Line (541) 776-7007 Josephine County Burn Line (541) 476-WOOD (9663)

Open Burning Tip #2 - Check the weather!

Even when burning is allowed local weather conditions such as strong winds can create hazardous conditions. Strong winds carry hot embers from your burn pile that can ignite distant spot fires. Never burn debris piles on windy days.

Open Burning Tip #3 - Prepare the burn site!

When it comes to burning safely it is all about selecting and preparing the proper site. Select a site where airborne burning embers, radiant heat, and spreading flames will not ignite nearby vegetation or objects. To help prevent flame spread, always scrape a fireline down to bare soil or gravel around the burn pile's location.

Never place burn piles:

- Near structures
- Underneath tree limbs
- On top of tree stumps or roots
- Underneath powerlines
- On steep slopes

Open Burning Tip #4 - Assemble the necessary firefighting equipment!



Before burning any woody debris on your property you need to have a shovel on-hand and:

- A fire extinguisher or
- Charged garden hose that extends 50 feet away from the burn pile and
- Keep the area surrounding the burn pile wet when burning

Open Burning Tip #5 - Think Small!



Small burn piles are much easier to control so limit the size of your pile and cut materials to be burned into smaller pieces. Burn piles should never exceed 4 feet wide by 4 feet tall by 8 feet long. As debris in the burn pile is consumed you can add small amounts of additional debris to the pile until you are done burning for the day.

Open Burning Tip #6 - NEVER leave your burn piles unattended!



Property owners are required by the state to monitor any burning on their lands at all times. Burning debris and airborne embers can escape a burning pile and ignite spot fires. When monitoring your debris burns contact 911 immediately if the burn gets out of control.

Open Burning Tip #7 - Only burn during daylight hours!

When burning debris on your property all burning materials need to be completely extinguished at day's end. Never leave your burn pile burning at night. To extinguish your burn pile:

- Drown the fire with water.
- Stir the ashes with a shovel.
- Repeat the process several times until the remains are cool to the touch and the fire is **DEAD OUT**.

Always re-check the burn area the following day. Even when a fire appears to be out wind or a warm day can re-ignite ashes or duff layers above ground, and burned tree roots below ground. Landowners can be held responsible for fire suppression costs in the event an open burn re-ignites, escapes, and causes major damage.

Use of Burn Barrels

Another open burning option for landowners are burn barrels. Burn barrel use follows the same restrictions as burn piles. However, unlike burn piles, burn barrels may be used during fire season **until June 30th**, providing the landowner obtains the necessary burn permit from the Oregon Department of Forestry, **and** it is a burn day. After June 30th, no debris burning of any kind is allowed during fire season in Southwest Oregon.

Only Use Approved Burn Barrels

- Heavy mesh metal screen on top and bottom vent must not be less than 14 gauge wire with holes not larger than 1/4 inch.
- Metal barrel must be in good condition.
- Ground cleared to mineral soil at least 10 feet around circumference of the burn barrel.
- Charged garden hose at the burn barrel site.

Remember, whenever you burn, think safety and act responsibly!

Open burning of woody debris is a disposal option for some landowners, providing precautions are followed. Landowners choosing to burn should always follow burning safety guidelines and adhere to burning restrictions that help regulate air quality. According to the DEQ, residents of the Rogue Basin have seen up to a ten-fold decrease in particulate matter in their air over the last twenty-five years, a direct result of air quality control strategies. Today, alternatives to burning such as woody debris recycling and wood chipping can be efficient tools to help increase air quality, reduce the risk of wildfire, and retain vital nutrients within the soils on your property. ■ ~ John O'Connor

Compost Corner

TIPS FROM THE BIN

By RHIANNA SIMES
OSU EXTENSION SERVICE



Winter is upon us and the tree leaves have fallen. Now is the time to prune your trees and thin your forest. Of course, you are left with piles of woody debris, dry leaves and various size sticks. This carbon-rich, woody material is a great source of nutrients for your compost pile, for material to chip for paths, or for garden mulch.

Some simple pruning suggestions are to look for branches that are dead, diseased or dying. Cut these branches first. Then, look for branches that are crossing, broken or simply in your way. As you move around the tree, continue pruning keeping the same qualifications in mind. Make sure that each branch is pruned above the branch collar, so that the cut can heal over correctly. For bigger branches, do an initial undercut to prevent the bark from ripping, and then complete the top cut (see illustration 1).

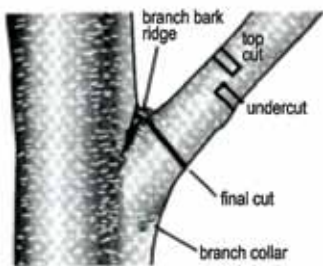


Illustration 1

By caring for your trees in this way, you will boost overall vigor, and increase the production of flowers and fruit. Healthy trees are also more capable of withstanding drought stress, insect attack, and they are more fire-resistant. For more detailed instructions on how to prune correctly, attend a class from the OSU Extension Service or read *Selecting, Planting, and Caring for a New Tree* (OSU publication EC 1438).

As you remove the pruned material, create piles of similar sized branches. Pile the pruned branches in such a way that the cut ends are in the same direction. This will make running them through a chipper

much more efficient. If you have your own chipper, you are good to go. Other options include borrowing a chipper from a friend or neighbor, renting one for the afternoon or paying a local arborist to chip the woody material for you. Remember, these wood chips are a great source of carbon for the compost pile, useful as paths in landscape or helpful as mulch in garden beds.

Wood chips in the compost pile take a while to break down. Even so, the aged chips can be a great way to amend clay or decomposed granite soils by providing organic material of varying particle size. This allows for better water percolation, moisture retention, and will improve soil structure over time.



Consider using pruned branches for creative projects like this compost bin!

Small branches in the compost pile can be layered on the bottom and as layers within the pile. This strategy will help maintain air flow and provide an easy entry point for your pitch fork when turning the pile. Note that the branches will not break down quickly. Once the remainder of your pile has decomposed, place the branches to the side for reuse in a new pile.

Great materials for composting:

- Excess fruit and produce
- Animal bedding and manure
- Fallen leaves
- Branches from pruning
- Frost bitten plants
- Rain-spoiled hay
- Wood chips!

Fire Resistant Plants for Privacy Screens

Many landowners wish to establish and maintain plant screens or hedges along driveways, property lines, and roads for purposes of privacy as well as dust control. Privacy screens can provide wildlife habitat and add beauty to your landscape. However, some commonly used privacy screen plants such as Leyland cypress and juniper species are highly flammable and are, thus riskier to use in wildfire-prone environments. For example, Leyland cypress contributed to the spread of the fast-moving Oak Knoll fire in Ashland in summer 2010 that destroyed several homes! Aside from having flammable leaves and foliage, such plants often accumulate dried, dead material inside the lower portion of the plant, due to shading from above. This dry material can then form a fuel ladder from the ground upward. And if the screening plants are in contact with a fence or outbuilding, they may serve as a fuse transporting the fire to the wooden structure.

In fire-prone areas, use of fire-resistant plants in privacy screens can reduce fire risk. The following list includes trees and shrubs, both deciduous and evergreen, that are relatively fire-resistant* and are suitable for hedgerow and privacy screen plantings in the interior of Southwestern Oregon (Jackson & Josephine Counties). Some are natives; some are ornamentals. This list isn't exhaustive but includes a variety of plants to choose from. Carefully consider the mature size of the plant; for example, plants shouldn't be taller than 25 feet if they are located under utility lines. Consider staggering plants in two rows instead of planting them in one continuous row. Although this will take up more space, it still provides a screen and the separation of plants helps reduce the spread of fire. Also, choose shrubs and trees that have multiple trunks, or are low branching in order to create more foliar screening, and thus, more privacy.

As with any fire-resistant planting, sun requirements, soil health, and other maintenance is critical. Deep watering, mulching, and the removal of deadwood and leaves help to maintain overall health and reduce flammability of any landscape plant. Planting the right shrub or tree in the right place can make all the difference in its long term health and vigor. Do keep in mind that heavy shearing may promote a dense outer crown, resulting in less sunlight reaching the interior of the hedge and will cause dieback of twigs. This dieback will create flammable material in the center of even healthy, well-placed shrubs and trees.

Privacy and safety can go hand and hand by selecting fire-resistant shrubs and trees, planting them away from structures, maintaining their health, and removing dead material when necessary. See the list below for some recommendations.



Leyland cypress privacy screen consumed in a wildfire. (Ali True photo)

Fire-resistant landscaping and plant selection

If you live in a high risk wildfire zone, fire-resistant landscaping should be part of your thinking. Fire-resistant landscaping includes native and ornamental trees and shrubs as well as turf, gardens, and hardscapes that are not as prone to catching fire. These elements can be combined in ways to produce an overall landscape that is attractive, less flammable, and one that may help protect your home by blocking intense heat. Fire-resistant does not mean fireproof.

Plant Selection

Fire-resistant plants don't ignite easily when exposed to flames. They may be killed by fire but don't contribute significantly to fuel loads and, thus fire intensity. Most fire-resistant plants have moist leaves, water-like and odorless sap, and are low in resins or volatile oils. They tend not to accumulate dry, dead material within the plant. By contrast, highly flammable plants typically have aromatic leaves that release a sticky sap when crushed between the fingers. The leaves, twigs, and stems contain volatile oils and other substances that burn readily, and they accumulate dead leaves and twigs within the plant.

Many deciduous trees and shrubs, both native and non-native, are fire-resistant. There are also some fire-resistant evergreen shrubs. These tend to be low-growing with high foliar moisture content. Examples include Oregon boxwood (*Paxistima myrtifolia*) and Oregon grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*). Among conifer trees, Ponderosa Pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) is the species native to the Rogue Valley that is the most fire resistant, primarily due to its thick bark and habit of self-pruning. Most conifers have relatively flammable foliage, but can be included in fire-resistant landscapes when the lower branches are pruned (over time) to a height of 10ft or more.

There are a variety of fire-resistant trees, shrubs, perennials, annuals, and groundcovers to choose from. Their needs vary from full sun, to shade, and some attract butterflies or birds. Some are even reputed to be (kinda') deer resistant! When selecting plants, make sure they will perform well in our local climate, and that they will receive supplemental water during our dry summers. For a list of plants check out [Fire-Resistant Plants for Home Landscapes](#), available through OSU Extension.

Landscaping

Fire-resistant landscaping focuses on the selection of appropriate plants, their placement, and maintenance over time. Even fire-resistant plants can become dangerous if they are planted under eaves, next to a wood pile, near windows, or surrounded by dry, bark mulch. Create buffers with walkways, lawn, or other hardscape materials in order to break up areas in the landscape. This is especially important if a fire-prone plant is included in your garden (like Rosemary, dwarf conifers, etc). Although these plants can add to a the fuel load, you can reduce your risk by making sure they are placed away from structures, separated by a non-flammable landscape material, and/or not contiguously planted. Fire-resistant landscaping is a spectrum that is contingent upon the site where it is located, goals of the garden, and personal preference. However, the bottom line is to avoid foliage near a wood pile, under eaves, and to break up the landscape with non-flammable hardscape materials.

Maintenance

It's important to recognize that fire-resistant does not mean fireproof. Plants that are ordinarily fire-resistant may burn if they are drought-stressed, not properly pruned, or otherwise poorly maintained. On-going maintenance is critical: water adequately, fertilize as needed, control pests, prune to remove dead material, and don't allow dry leaves or weeds to accumulate between plantings.

Note: Just because some plants / shrubs/ trees have been identified as more fire-prone, does not mean that you should completely clear them off your property. In fact, it is more important to consider where they are located, if they are within the defensible space near your home, and if they are healthy and well-cared for. Placement and care are very important factors to consider before planting or removing plants in a fire-resistant landscape.

For more information, including lists of suitable plants, see [Fire-Resistant Plants for Home Landscapes](#), available through OSU Extension or OSU Publications.org, and [Garden Guide for the Rogue Valley: Ornamental Trees & Shrubs](#), also available through OSU Extension. ■

This article was adapted from these publications with input from Rhianna Simes, OSU Ext. Land Steward Coordinator, and Max Bennett, OSU Forestry and Natural Resource Agent. (See PNW 590)

Shrubs - deciduous

Red Osier Dogwood	<i>Cornus sericea</i> (C. stolonifera)
Burning Bush	<i>Euonymus alatus</i>
Oceanspray	<i>Holodiscus discolor</i>
Wayfaring tree viburnum	<i>Viburnum lentana</i>
Western spiraea	<i>Spiraea douglasii</i>
Lilac	<i>Syringa</i> spp.
Rose species	<i>Rosa</i> sp.
Nannyberry bush viburnum	<i>Viburnum lentago</i>
Serviceberry	<i>Amelanchier</i> sp.
Mock orange (part shade)	<i>Philadelphus</i> sp.
Hydrangea (Shade)	<i>Hydrangea</i> spp.
Snowberry (part shade)	<i>Symphoricarpos albus</i>

Shrubs - evergreen

Burkwood Viburnum	<i>Viburnum x burkwoodii</i> (shade)
California lilac	<i>Ceanothus</i> sp. 'Victoria'
Hop bush	<i>Dodonaea viscosa</i>
Evergreen Euonymus	<i>Euonymus japonicus</i>
Japanese Privet	<i>Ligustrum japonicum</i>
Golden Privet	<i>Ligustrum 'Vicayi'</i>
Tall Oregon grape	<i>Mahonia aquifolium</i>
Oregon boxwood	<i>Paxistima myrtifolia</i>
Photinia	<i>Photinia x fraserii</i>
Rhododendron (shade)	<i>Rhododendron macrophyllum</i>
Camellia (shade)	<i>Camellia</i> spp.

Trees - deciduous

Hedge maple	<i>Acer campestre</i>
Red alder	<i>Alnus rubra</i>
Mountain alder	<i>Alnus tenuifolia</i>
Greenspire Linden	<i>Tilia cordata</i> 'Greenspire'
Rocky mountain maple	<i>Acer glabrum</i>
Upright hornbeam	<i>Carpinus betulus</i> 'Fastigiata'
Eastern redbud	<i>Cercis canadensis</i>
Bigleaf maple	<i>Acer Macrophyllum</i>
Hazel	<i>Corylus cornuta</i>
Birch	<i>Betula</i> spp.
California sycamore	<i>Platanus racemosa</i>
Vine maple (shade)	<i>Acer circinatum</i>
Pacific dogwood (shade)	<i>Cornus nuttallii</i>

Trees - evergreen

Southern Magnolia	<i>Magnolia grandiflora</i>
Coast Live Oak	<i>Quercus agrifolia</i>
Ponderosa Pine	<i>Pinus ponderosa</i>

*As stated in PNW 590 [Fire-Resistant Plants for Home Landscapes](#), "Fire-resistant does not mean fireproof. Even fire-resistant plants will burn if not well maintained. Be sure to keep all of your landscape plants healthy with appropriate watering, proper pruning, etc."

HEATING SAFELY

With the freezing temperatures that have hit our region, many people are relying on heaters and woodstoves as their main source of heat. Now is the time to inspect your heat source to prevent a fire or other tragedy from occurring.



Electric Heaters

- Only use heaters that are equipped with a thermostat control mechanism and an automatic shut off switch that turns the heater off if it is tipped over.
- Keep combustible materials (i.e. curtains, clothing, bedding etc.) at least three feet away.
- Check the heater cord for fraying or cracks, and don't use if either are present.
- Never plug your heater into an extension cord, this can result in overloading your circuit and cause a fire.
- Always unplug your heaters before you leave your house or go to bed.

Furnaces

- Have a trained professional inspect and clean your home's central heating system.
- Change your furnace filters regularly.
- Leave all furnace repairs to a qualified specialist.

Propane Heaters

- Only use propane heaters indoors if they are designed for that purpose, and follow all the manufacture guidelines for use.
- Make sure you have adequate ventilation.
- If the smell of gas is present, immediately shut the gas supply off, evacuate your home, and call your propane supplier from your neighbor's home.

Wood Stoves or Fireplaces

- Have your chimney inspected and cleaned annually by a certified specialist. The creosote needs to be cleaned out, and the chimney inspected for cracks and obstructions to prevent fires.
- Use heavy duty screen mesh or heat tempered glass on fireplaces to prevent embers from escaping and igniting other materials.
- Keep the doors of your wood stove closed, unless adding wood to the fire.
- Limit burning of paper products and green wood as it can cause heavy creosote buildup. Try to only burn dry, seasoned wood.
- Never use liquid accelerants to start a fire; doing so could result in serious injury or fire spread to your home.
- Clear the area of combustible material (i.e. firewood, newspapers, rugs) a minimum of three feet around your hearth.
- Make sure your fire is completely out before leaving the house or going to bed.

Reminder:

- Always have working smoke alarms installed on every level of your home, inside and outside of sleep areas.
- Protect your family from carbon monoxide (CO) poison, by installing CO alarms, according to manufacturer's instructions, in a central location outside each sleeping area and on every level of the home.
- Create and practice a home escape plan. ■



PREVENT FLUE FIRES

Winter is the perfect season to cozy up next to the fireplace and enjoy the ambience. To ensure you're prepared for these rainy, cold days please remember to have your chimney cleaned and inspected by a certified specialist, this should be done annually. The creosote needs to be cleaned out, and the chimney inspected for cracks and obstructions to prevent fires. ■



Change your Batteries

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), "65% of home fire deaths happen in homes with no smoke alarms at all or no smoke alarms that work." Deaths related to fire usually occur from smoke inhalation not flames, and typically happen between midnight and 8 a.m. when most families are asleep.

There are several different types of smoke alarms available:

- Ionization: Quicker at sensing flaming, fast-moving fires.
- Photoelectric: Quicker at sensing smoldering fires.
- Combination or dual sensor: These have ionization and photoelectric sensors in one unit to sense flaming and smoldering fires.
- Smoke/carbon monoxide: Activated by smoke or carbon monoxide.
- Visual (strobe light) and tactile (shaker): For the deaf and those hard of hearing.

Following these simple tips will ensure you rest easy knowing you and your family will be alerted in the event of a fire.

- Install smoke alarms according to manufacturer's instructions high on a wall on the ceiling; in each bedroom, outside sleeping areas; and on every level of the home including the basement.
- Test alarms at least monthly to make sure they are working properly.
- Change the batteries at least once annually, and replace the entire unit every 8-10 years.
- Vacuum smoke alarms regularly to keep them free of dust and cobwebs.
- Never disable smoke alarms activated by non-fire causes, instead push the hush button located on the outside of the smoke alarm, or ventilate the room by opening windows.



For more information on smoke alarms and Oregon's smoke alarm law, visit: www.oregon.gov/osp/sfm/commed_sa_program.shtml

Carbon monoxide (CO), what you need to know to keep your family safe:

- Carbon monoxide is an invisible, odorless, colorless gas that can come from a variety of sources including heaters, fireplaces, furnaces, appliances and cooking sources using coal, wood, petroleum products, and other fuels.
- Carbon monoxide accounts for over 10,000 injuries annually.
- CO alarms should be installed according to manufacturer's instructions, in a central location outside each sleeping area and on every level of the home.
- Choose a CO alarm that has the label of a recognized testing laboratory.
- As with smoke alarms, test CO alarms at least once a month and replace them according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- If the CO alarm sounds, evacuate everyone inside and go outside. Call for help from an alternate location, and wait there until fire service personnel arrive.

Remember smoke and CO alarms are only part of the equation for keeping your family safe; make a home escape plan and practice it. ■

Creating a Fire Escape Plan

Picture it dark and scary. Your home is filled with smoke. You are having a hard time breathing. Now is not the time to try and figure out how to get out of your home when you are disoriented. If you think it is bad for you, think of how hard it is for kids.

You need to have a fire escape plan and you need to practice it with your family. Always make sure exit paths from your home are not blocked by household items or clutter.

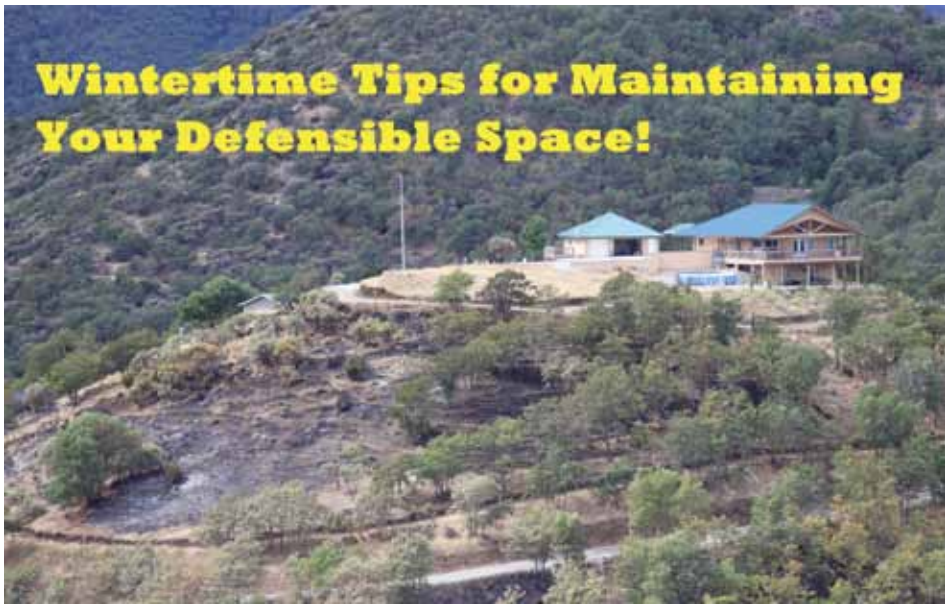
Making a Plan

1. Draw a map of your home showing two ways out of each room.
2. Draw where the meeting place is going to be outside.
3. Practice the plan several times and continue to practice it every year.

Remember to get out and stay out! Never return back into the home to retrieve any personal items. ■

~ Mike Shaw

Wintertime Tips for Maintaining Your Defensible Space!



To help protect young saplings from fire, prune limbs from the lower 1/3 of the stem, leaving the upper 2/3 of the sapling's foliage. Always create a separation between the ground and the lower limbs.

Thinning out dead and dying trees within your defensible space boundaries helps produce a safer, healthier forest. Healthy, well-spaced trees are more fire-resistant and less susceptible to insect and disease attacks. Increasing tree spacing during the winter months also helps to reduce plant-to-plant spread of a fire during the dry summer months.



A defensible space is the best protection your home can have from wildfires. Reducing flammable vegetation around homes, driveways and outbuildings significantly increases your property's chances of surviving a wildfire. Live vegetation around your home and property grows each year. An important aspect of fire prevention around your home is to adopt a continual, fuels reduction maintenance schedule that keeps all vegetation lean, clean, and green throughout the year.

VEGETATION GROWS SO MANAGE IT!

Vegetation continually grows so maintaining it year-round helps to protect it and you from wildfire. Here are a few helpful tips for maintaining your home's defensible space this winter.

- ✓ **Have branches on mature trees lengthened to droop closer to the ground or into other plants?** Prune them up at least ten feet from the ground and above other plants.
- ✓ **Have shrubs grown up into the understory under trees or near your home's defensible perimeter?** Remove all flammable brush within the 30 feet of your home and break-up continuous layers of surface vegetation and ladder fuels around your property.
- ✓ **Have tree limbs near your home grown near the roof, chimneys, porches or decks?** It is very important to keep tree limbs at least ten feet from chimneys or stovepipes and from touching any portion of your home.
- ✓ **Have any trees or other vegetation died within 100 feet of your home since your last fuels treatment?** Thin out any dead or dying vegetation from your defined defensible space boundaries.
- ✓ **Have tree limbs grown in over the top your of your driveway?** For safe access and egress, prune them back to maintain at least 13-1/2 feet of vertical clearance across the entire width of your driveway.



The cool, moist months of winter are the best time for doing the many fuel reduction maintenance activities around your property. Activities such as removing highly flammable ladder fuels including understory brush and low-hanging tree limbs can reduce the spread of a ground fire to other vegetation and to your home.

During the winter months sap production in trees is at its lowest making this the best time to prune them without causing injury to the tree. Pruning mature trees at least ten feet above the ground prevents ground fires from spreading to tree crowns and killing the tree.



A properly maintained driveway provides an effective fuel break allowing you safe access and escape routes to and from your home. Always thin up and out from your driveway's surface to allow access for large emergency equipment. All driveways should include:

- Address sign at foot of driveway
- 12-foot-wide horizontal clearance
- 13-1/2 feet of vertical clearance
- Good visibility on corners
- 50,000 lb capacity bridges



Dead plant material in gutters or on your roof is highly flammable and susceptible to airborne burning embers. Always keep your gutters and roof clear of flammable debris during fire season. Keeping gutters clean during the rainy season prevents overflow and makes spring clean-up easier.



MAINTAIN YOUR FUEL BREAKS IN A LEAN, CLEAN & GREEN CONDITION YEAR-ROUND

Primary fuel breaks are designed to reduce the intensity and rate of wildfire spread to the home by reducing hazardous fuels, and by using fire-resistant building materials. They also create a safe area for fire suppression operations to take place. **Primary** fuel breaks should extend out at least 30 feet from your home.

Secondary fuel breaks increase the total distance around a structure where vegetation has been thinned to reduce the fire's rate of spread. This is an area where firefighters can safely access the property, and suppression activities can occur more safely. The **secondary** fuel break is site-specific, and is determined by factors on your property such as aspect, slope and vegetation type. For free advice on how to define **your** defensible space boundaries, contact the Oregon Department of Forestry or your local fire protection district for a **free** home assessment.

Maintaining your home's fuel breaks is the best protection you can have from a spreading wildfire. By removing flammable understory ladder fuels and thinning dead or dying trees during the winter you help to promote healthier, more fire-resistant surroundings. Make your home and property safe from wildfire by maintaining your defensible space year-round. ■

~ John O'Connor

Connect with the Rogue Valley Fire Prevention Cooperative



www.facebook.com/rogue-valley-fire-prevention-cooperative

"Like" rvfpc and link to local fire prevention activities for kids and families, national news about family emergency planning, tips for keeping pets and livestock out of harm's way during disasters, and guidelines for protecting your home against fire, inside and out.



To report a fire,
call 9-1-1



IS IT A HAZARD ... OR ... IS IT A RISK?



We often hear the terms *fire hazard* and *fire risk*, but do they mean the same thing? I've sometimes heard these terms being

interchanged, by both private citizens and fire agency personnel alike. Is it really important to know the difference?

My answer, as a wildland-urban interface property owner is yes, it is! I've personally found that the exercise of analyzing risk versus hazard has helped me tremendously when trying to assess my own fire danger, so that I can plan what to work on around the house.

Maintaining a defensible space around your home is hard work, and it never ends. Every year or so something new comes into the equation, whether it be a new landscape tree, a new shed, new neighbors or a drought. All of these can affect your fire danger – your hazards and your risks.



Keeping grass mowed to four inches or less will lessen the intensity of fast-moving surface fires.

A *fire hazard* is something that is *flammable*. If exposed to heat or flame, a hazard can ignite, burn and spread a wildfire – to places you don't want it to go.

A *fire risk* is something that can *start a fire - something that has heat*. A lightning strike can spark a fire; so can a propane torch, a vehicle's hot exhaust muffler, a campfire, and a cigarette. However, a campfire or cigarette, by themselves and unlit, are not a fire risk. Most *fire risks* include man in the picture. In SW Oregon in the past decade, over 71% of wildfires were started in some way by humans.

Fire risks depend a lot upon factors that come and go – a set of circumstances that line up to ignite a fire. One common source of wildfire *risk* comes from roads. With no vehicles on a road, there is no *risk*. However, adding vehicles that can get over-heated, or that have a careless smoker inside, or that might crash, and properties next to that road are *at risk* for wildfires.

Add to this degree of *risk* the fact that state and county governments don't have the resources that they had in the past to cut and/or remove weeds alongside our local roadways. Three-foot tall dry weeds along roadways instead of 4-inch tall cut vegetation will definitely increase the *risks* of a small fire spreading quickly. Consider what might not have happened if the vegetation along I-5 had been cut down last summer in the south Ashland area. Those eleven homes in the Oak Knoll neighborhood might not have burned.

Other sources of *fire risk* to wildland-urban interface properties can come from hikers, hunters, campers, fireworks, off-road vehicles, kids, and people using

equipment or BBQs. So, consider these possible *risk* factors in relation to your own property and your home, and manage your hazardous fuels accordingly. Perhaps by increasing your thinning along a road or next to federal land where the public hikes? Because, unlike lightning strikes, we do have some control over the human-caused *risk* factors and how they might affect our property's fire safety.

When talking about *fire hazards*, we most often consider natural and landscape vegetation (especially dead or dry fuel) as the main *fire hazard* when looking at our defensible space. We work to remove "hazardous fuels", thereby mitigating our fire danger. However, many other things around our homesites are also flammable, and could easily contribute to our home burning.

Because more homes burn due to ember storms than from a fire approaching in the forest, the concept of our house as a *hazard* has been emphasized in recent years. What on or around your house can cause it to burn? How can embers get inside to ignite the home? (This is a whole article in itself, and mitigating this "Home Ignition Zone" is a five-step process that you can find more information on at www.firewise.com or www.RVFPC.com.)

Other potential *fire hazards* around the home are firewood piles, propane tanks, stuffed patio furniture, trash, vehicles, wood fences, and even fiber door mats. These are all manageable things to address prior to fire season each summer, or when a wildfire is approaching. Keep your homesite clean. Move firewood at least 30 feet away from structures during the summer, keep weeds and grass trimmed to under 4" in height and away from wooden fences or buildings,



Removing overhanging vegetation will aid emergency vehicles in responding to fires.

and, keep fine fuels away from propane and vehicle storage areas. Say, did you note that I've mentioned automobiles as both *hazards* and *risks*?! What's the component that makes the difference? Humans!

Finally, don't ignore the need to thin vegetation both around your homesite and along your driveway each year, because this makes the home "defensible," meaning it will be safer for firefighters to protect your home during a wildfire event. If it's not safe for them to get to your house, they may not even try.

Hopefully this discussion of *hazard* versus *risk* has been helpful, and has given you some ideas of what sort of chores you'll need to be doing this winter to make your home more fire safe. ■

~ Sandy Shaffer



The Citizen Alert! emergency notification system is now live at www.JacksonCounty.org/alert. Jackson County residents are encouraged to go to the web site and register their contact information to help ensure they can be reached quickly in cases of emergency.



In the case of a flood, forest fire, or other disaster you may want to apply online to be in the Disaster Registry at http://www.co.jackson.or.us/File/DisasterRegistry_RV-COG.pdf if you, or someone you care for, would:

- Need outside help to safely leave your home during a disaster
- Be in jeopardy if you stayed in your home, without assistance, for three days;
- Need special notification about the need for evacuation, due to impairment.



Would you need special help in an emergency?