

FIREBRAND

SUMMER 2011

PUBLISHED BY THE ROGUE VALLEY FIRE PREVENTION COOPERATIVE

Beware of Ember Showers

It's the little things that matter, even when it comes to protecting your house from wildfire.

Walls of flame look scary – and they're extremely dangerous for humans – but little wind-driven embers from an advancing fire are far more likely to burn your house to the ground. Glowing embers can start a fire on your roof, or in dry leaves beside your house. That's why it makes sense now, at the beginning of wildfire season, to take the small precautions that can help your house survive if a wildfire moves through your neighborhood.

Making your home fire safe isn't just for people who live "in the woods." In recent years, Medford and Ashland had major wildfires within their city limits. Eleven homes burned in Ashland's Oak Knoll fire in 2010, and whole neighborhoods were threatened during Medford's Deer Creek blaze in 2009.

Researchers who studied neighborhoods that burned during wildfires have learned that most of the houses that burn are ignited by falling embers, said Greg Kleinberg, a fire marshal for the city of Medford.

Kleinberg explained how it happens. When fires burn through the crowns of trees, they consume millions of needles and leaves, and the hot wind created by the heat and flames carry sparks and embers into the air. You may have seen one of those ember "blizzards" on TV – thousands of glowing, red-hot embers swirling through streets and yards as residents fled their homes. Those embers (also known as firebrands) are carried far ahead of the flames, and when they land on any dry material they can kindle new flames – on the forest floor or in a pile of needles on your roof.

This time of year, as fire season is just beginning, the goal is to clear the

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Kari Greer/US Forest Service

Big fires that incinerate whole trees in seconds are awe-inspiring, but those flames may not last long enough to generate enough radiant heat to start a house fire if there's a cleared, defensible space around the building.

Researchers have learned that big, fast-moving fires typically generate their intense heat for about one minute or less as they pass – not enough time to make a wall or a roof catch fire. That's why it's critical to reduce or eliminate flammable materials around the house, on the roof and in the gutters. Without those fuels, wildfires often blow right past houses where fuels have been removed.

Ten things to do around your house for wildfire safety

1. Keep all grass and weeds cut short – no more than 4 inches tall.
2. Make sure all gutters are clean.



3. Move all firewood or lumber at least 30 feet away from the house.
4. Remove all fallen needles and bark mulch within 18 inches of the foundation and replace with gravel.
5. Make sure all dead vegetation is removed from landscaping around the house.
6. Remove highly combustible vegetation such as junipers that are close to the house.
7. Eliminate "ladder fuels" – such as ground hugging tree branches that can carry flames up to the crowns of trees.
8. Remove combustible materials from decks, and remove combustible materials that may be stored under the deck.



9. Trim trees to keep branches at least 10 feet from the house and provide open space between trees.
10. Cover the house's vent openings with 1/8-inch wire mesh to prevent embers from blowing into (or under) the structure.



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Beware — *Continued from page 1*

area immediately around your house of pine needles, dead leaves, ground litter and anything else that could ignite the building, said Kamron Ismaili, fire prevention officer for the Illinois Valley Fire District.

“An ember can fall into a pile of leaves next to your house and start a fire that can burn right up the edge of the siding,” Ismaili said.

“There’s a lot people can do,” he said, encouraging people to clear a space at least 18 inches wide around the foundation of their homes.

People should give their house a thorough examination from the roof down, Kleinberg said. “Walk around and look at everything” with an eye to what could be ignited by falling embers.

That includes firewood or lumber that may have been stored on a covered deck over the winter. Firewood should be moved at least 30 feet from the house because it can generate considerable heat if it catches fire.

“It’s easy to ignite, and once it gets going it’s hard to put out,” said Ali True of Ashland Fire Rescue. True

helps Ashland neighborhoods improve their fire safety through Firewise, a national fire awareness program.

Landscaping around the house should be pruned to remove flammable dead material. Decorative species

such as junipers are notorious for building up large quantities of dead branches that burn hot and fast if they’re ignited. Blackberries and other flammable cane fruits should be grown away from the house, too.

Removing dry leaves from gutters and the roof itself is critical, True said, because embers can easily ignite a fire in the gutter or the roof that could spread quickly into structural elements of the house, especially on a wood-shake roof. Nothing burns quite like a wood roof that’s been desiccated by years of hot summer sun.

Keeping grass and vegetation short is critical as the grass dries in the summer heat, True said. Dry grass

ignites like paper, and fire burns fast and hot through tall, dry grass and weeds. Closely cropped dry grass can burn, too, but the flame creeps along the ground and makes relatively little heat.



Dry grass ignites like paper and burns fast

Grass doesn’t have to be watered, True said, “but it has to be short.” She encourages people to keep their grass no higher than 4 inches for the duration of fire season.

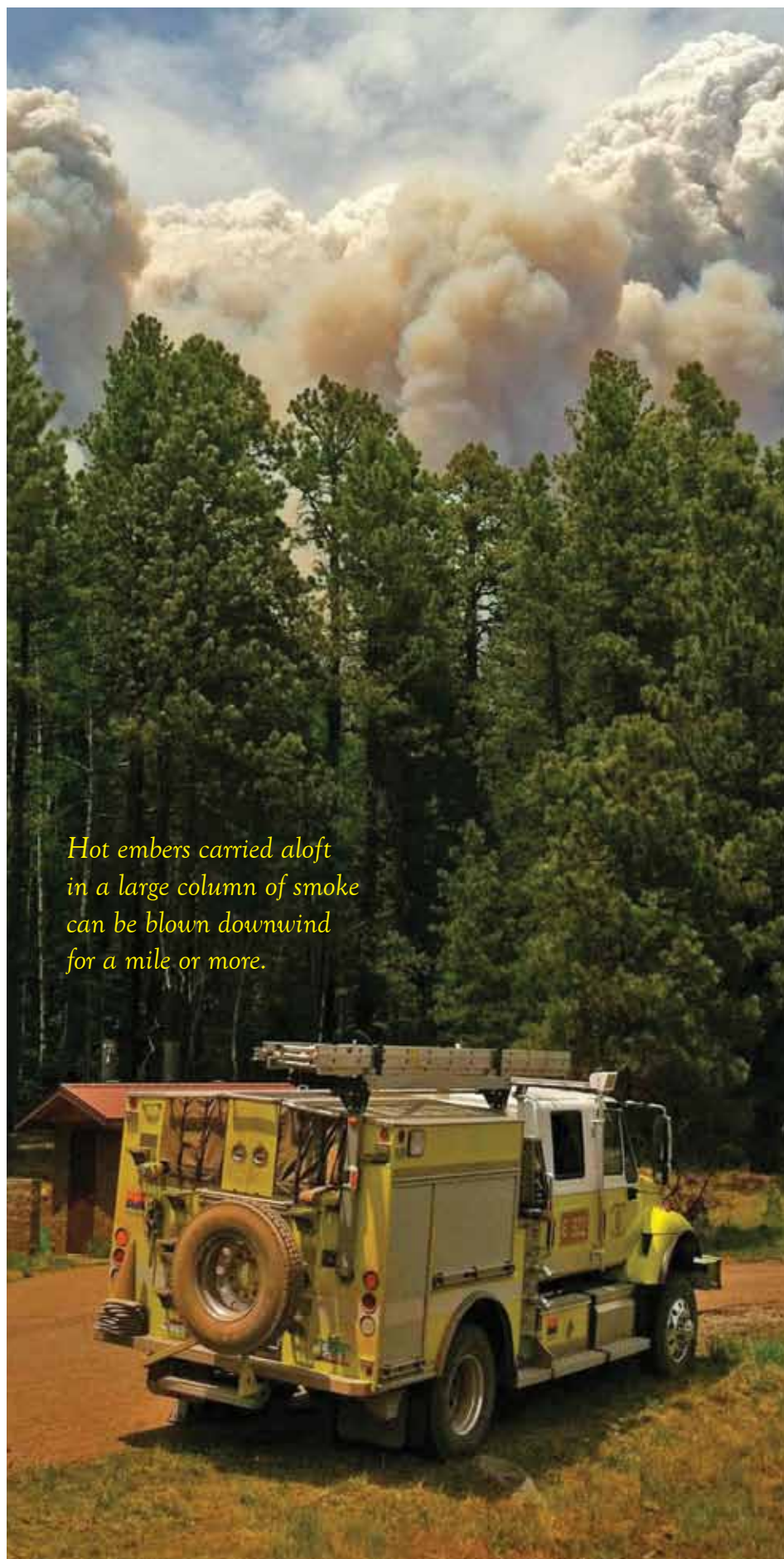
She also encouraged homeowners to remove bark mulch around the perimeter of house foundations, and replace it with gravel, especially if flammable siding material comes down close to the soil.

“We live in a fire-prone environment,” True said, noting that embers can be blown a mile ahead of the flames. “You don’t have to live in a hazard zone to be affected.” ■

— Bill Kettler



rvfpc.com



Hot embers carried aloft in a large column of smoke can be blown downwind for a mile or more.

US Forest Service

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The *Firebrand* is published by the Rogue Valley Fire Prevention Cooperative (RVFPC), a 501 (c) 4 nonprofit corporation.

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.”





PREVENT GRASS FIRES

Many wildfires in southwest Oregon start as grass fires. They start surprisingly easy – by a lawnmower blade striking a rock, a pickup truck’s exhaust pipe dragging across grass on a dirt road, an electric fence wire snapping against a metal post – and spread quickly. It doesn’t take very much wind or slope for a grass fire to grow from a fire a few yards in size to a wildfire spanning several acres. To keep a grass fire from turning into a destructive wildfire, seconds count. Plan ahead to use those seconds wisely.

The best way to reduce the chance of a grass fire occurring on your property is to cut tall, dry grass before fire season begins. Roadsides and along driveways are common places for vehicle-caused grass fires to start. Pay special attention to places where vehicles may stop and idle, such as around mailboxes, gates and turnouts. Cutting grass around homes and outbuildings, such as workshops and barns, reduce the chance of accidental fires caused by malfunctioning equipment, smokers and children (or adults) with fireworks.

In all cases, keep informed about fire season restrictions imposed by the Oregon Department of Forestry and your local fire district. Cut tall, dry grass early in the summer – as soon as the grass begins turning brown – when fire danger levels are either “low” or “moderate.” Mowing for non-agricultural purposes is restricted as soon as the fire danger level reaches the “high” mark, and completely disallowed once it hits the “extreme” level. Mowing during restricted or disallowed periods may result in a ticket; if a fire results, the person who caused the fire could be billed for fire suppression costs.

Plan ahead so you know what to do if a fire starts. Have basic fire-fighting equipment close at hand – at least five gallons of water, a fire extinguisher in every vehicle and building, and a shovel. Burlap sacks are also useful; wet them down with water and use the wet sacks to beat down flames. In all cases, have a way to call for help, such as a telephone or a citizen’s band radio. Always know your escape routes and check them frequently.

If a fire starts, immediately call 9-1-1 and tell the dispatcher the address of the property on which the fire is burning. If you caused the fire, you have a legal responsibility to try and keep the fire from spreading. Never battle a grass fire by standing between the flames and unburned grass. Grass fires change direction without

warning, and even a small grass fire can be deadly. Instead, fight the fire from inside the blackened area that the fire has already burned. Work along the cooler flanks by putting out small flames. Aim water and fire extinguisher streams at the base of the flames, not the tops.

But the best way to fight a grass fire is to prevent it from starting.

Electric fences

A strand of electric fencing tape or wire that is within arcing range of a t-post or metal gate can generate a spark each time the transformer pulses. If tall, dry grass or weeds are within range of the spark, a fire could start and quickly spread. It takes only a breeze or a gentle slope to turn a small grass fire into a swiftly spreading wildfire that could threaten homes, barns and other outbuildings. To keep such fires from starting, trim tall grass wherever electric fencing is strung. Check connections often to ensure arcing isn’t occurring anywhere along the fence’s path. Position a line tester within easy view of the home and make a habit of checking the flash often. If the tester’s flash is weak, or isn’t flashing at all, there’s a short – possibly a spark-generating one – somewhere along the fenceline.

Vehicles

Hot exhaust pipes can easily start a grass fire if the vehicle drives over or parks on top of dry grass. Hot particles of carbon from a vehicle’s exhaust pipe can also cause a grass fire. Ensure the exhaust systems on farm vehicles are in good condition, and that four-wheelers and motorcycles have spark arresters. Mow commonly used roads and trails prior to fire season. It is important to mow the centerline of a farm road as well as several feet on each side of the road. This will reduce the chance of fires being sparked by hot exhaust pipes and carbon particles.

Take care when using jumper cables to start a car that has a dead battery. Improper use of jumper cables can easily generate a strong spark, sufficient to start a wildfire – and potentially destroy an incapacitated vehicle.

In all cases, carry a fully charged fire extinguisher in each vehicle and ensure the operator knows how to use it. Carry a shovel should it be necessary to construct fireline, or defend the vehicle, an outbuilding, or yourself against a grassfire. Finally, carry a working cell phone or CB radio in each vehicle so that help can be summoned if necessary.



Mowers

Machinery used to cut tall, dry grass can cause a fire especially if accumulations of cut grass become lodged beneath the machine. Striking a rock with a whirling blade is all it takes to set off a fire that could destroy the machine and cause a wildfire. Heat and sparks thrown from the machine itself can also cause a fire. A good way to avoid such problems is to perform routine maintenance on the machine. Clear away buildups of cut grass that have become lodged underneath the machine. Sharpen blades and ensure they are not bent or misaligned. Check exhaust pipes for holes. If a spark arrester is supposed to be installed in the exhaust system, ensure the screen is positioned correctly, and is clean and

functional. Ensure the fuel system is not leaking, and check the electrical system for frayed wires and poor connections.

As with any other vehicle, make sure there is a fire extinguisher on board, a shovel close at hand, and a means for summoning help.

Get Expert Advice

Every piece of property is different, and each has unique fire-prevention problems to solve. A visit from a local fire prevention professional can answer those questions and provide you with realistic answers that you can use in your fire prevention strategy. Call the Oregon Department of Forestry or your local fire district to schedule a free fire prevention inspection. ■



The Results Are In!



Thanks to Jackson/Josephine County Title III funding, the Rogue Valley Fire Prevention Cooperative was able to conduct a public opinion survey on wildfire this spring in the Applegate Valley, the Seven Basins area, the Greensprings and Ashland's Wildfire Hazard Zone. We would like to thank everyone who filled out and returned our survey, because we had record-breaking return rates, ranging from 32% to 59% across the four communities!

Such a strong response by wildland-urban interface residents in these communities tells us a couple of things – that wildfire is something that people in the Rogue Basin know and care about, and that our past decade of outreach and education about wildfire has been successful. Because we reached such a large percentage of residents, our data is more reliable for planning future outreach and education efforts.

So, what exactly did we ask in the survey, and what did we find out? To begin, the majority of folks responding to the survey have lived in Southern Oregon for over twenty years. Aside from Ashland, where the parcels are small, the majority of respondents live on property ranging from one to 40 acres. Do they personally think their homes are at risk from wildfire? Responses across the four communities that we surveyed ranged from 51% to 74% in the affirmative. However, only 1-12% of respondents in these four communities had ever been evacuated due to a wildfire.

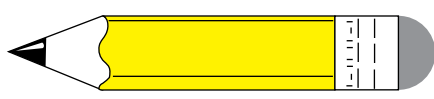
Also, 92-98% of the respondents agreed that private landowners *do* have a responsibility to reduce fire hazards on their own land. But, have they done so? Overwhelmingly, YES! More than 93% of respondents said they have completed defensible space around their homes (this is slightly skewed because we surveyed all private properties in the Greensprings and a large percentage of landowners up there do not have homes on their property). What we did find gratifying was that over 88% of those responding said they are also *maintaining* their defensible space each year!

The top three factors that were important to folks to create a defensible home were home/property protection, personal safety, and responsibility as a property owner. Compliance with the Oregon Forestland-Urban Interface Fire Protection Act (Senate Bill 360) and "what the neighbors were doing" were shown as far less important reasons to create a defensible space around one's home.

And while we found that folks were regularly mowing grass, cutting down weeds, and cleaning leaves and debris from their roof, gutters and yard, many were going beyond these annual tasks. Many folks responded that they prune and/or remove trees beyond the defensible space zone, and create fuel breaks to help protect their homes and property from wildfire.

We also asked folks how serious a problem several environment-related issues were in their area – what are they concerned about? The twelve topics were: too much logging of forests, uncontrollable wildfires, smoke from wildfires, smoke from prescribed burns, climate change, a clean water supply, poor planning for rural growth/development, invasive weeds, insects or diseases that kill trees, loss of habitat for wildlife and fish, loss of forest land, and fire management in forests and on public lands.

Per the respondents, the top three in terms of *very and/or extremely serious in our area* were: 1) insects and diseases that kill trees, 2) uncontrollable wildfires that destroy property and forests, and, 3) fire management in forests and public lands. I guess I'm not alone in noticing the larger Douglas-fir trees turning red over the past few years!



The three issues seen as least serious to respondents in these four communities were: 10) poorly-planned rural growth/development, 11) too much logging of forests, and 12) smoke from prescribed fire treatments.

In my humble opinion, this ranking of issues indicates that many folks are pretty savvy, observant and concerned about wildfire and natural resource management. This is Oregon, and our forests are important to us, right?! Indeed, the folks at Southern Oregon University's Research Center told me that scores of people either called their office or wrote notes on the survey itself to provide input and voice their opinions, because this issue was so important to them.

I sense that the completion and active implementation of our community and county wildfire protection plans over the past eight to ten years in the Rogue Valley has pushed these types of issues to the forefront, making folks more aware of changing issues and what their own role as a landowner is in the equation. So I say, great job, everyone! Let's all keep up the good work! ■

– Sandy Shaffer, RVFPC Survey Project Manager

Remember

—

ONLY YOU CAN
PREVENT WILDFIRES.

smokeybear.com






Compost Corner



TIPS FROM THE BIN



BY RHIANNA SIMES
OSU EXTENSION SERVICE

Spring and summer are marked by vacation days, fresh homegrown veggies, and the smell of cut grass. Most of us know that it is important to mow the grass around your home and property so that it does not create fuel ladders or other fire hazards during the dry months. However, mowing the lawn also creates a ton of great biomass that is perfect for the compost pile! The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) says at least one-third of all landfill material is yard waste and most of that material is grass clippings. Here are a couple of easy ways to utilize your grass clippings, and keep them out of the landfill!



Compost your grass clippings! To make it easy, designate your compost area, and have a ready supply of Carbonous (brown material) on site. I like to have bags of dry leaves from last fall or a bale of alfalfa hay sitting right beside where the compost pile will go. That way, when the lawn mower bag is full of grass clippings (green material) and ready to be emptied, the dry material is right there to create the layers. Remember to layer with 2 parts brown material to 1 part green material. Layer your pile, turn occasionally, and keep moist (not wet). Then, if you turn the pile once a week, your compost will be ready in about 2 months. Just in time to add to your flower beds or veggies.

Mulch it! Grass clippings make great, nutrient-rich mulch for established trees, veggie beds, or any other cultivated area in your yard. Cut the grass, bag it, and then layer it on top of the soil making sure to keep it away from trunks or stems! It is that simple.

Practice Grasscycling! This is the simple practice of leaving grass clippings on the lawn when mowing. Once cut, grass clippings dehydrate then decompose, quickly disappearing from view.

Grasscycling:

- Encourages a healthier lawn by returning nutrients to the soil beneath it.
- Reduces work because you don't have to bag or rake in order to dispose of your clippings.
- Saves you money because you don't have to pay for disposal of your clippings.
- Benefits the environment by naturally recycling the grass itself.

Simply put, whether you are composting, mulching or grasscycling - grass clippings are good for your garden, great for the soil, and can even save you money!

For more information or additional questions contact

Rhianna Simes, Land Steward
Coordinator at the OSU Extension Service,
(541) 776-7371.



Late Summer is a Good Time to Clean the Chimney

Fall is just around the corner, and with it comes chilly mornings. Many flue fires happen during this time of year because fireplaces and wood stoves haven't been used for a while. Creosote that builds up in the chimney is typically what ignites. To avert this problem, have the chimney cleaned before fall begins.

How do you tell if there is a creosote buildup in your chimney? If there is an exposed stovepipe, tap it with a screwdriver. If it pings, it is likely clean. If it thumps dully, it's dirty. The duller the thump, the dirtier the pipe. Also, look for drips of black creosote seeping from stovepipe connections.

Creosote buildup is

most likely in a wood stove's chimney pipe, especially a stove that can be dampened for long, slow burning.

Cleaning time is also a good time to check for repairs that may be needed, such as damaged or missing caps and screens, cracked lining, holes in pipes or gaps between joints. It is

also a good time to clean potentially flammable debris out of roof valleys and gutters, and – especially – for at least 10 feet around the chimney.

Last but not least, make sure there are working smoke alarms in all rooms of the house, and that a carbon monoxide detector is in the room with the fireplace or wood stove. ■



ROAD ACCESS ESSENTIALS



Keeping driveways clear of vegetation and accessible to large emergency equipment not only increases your home's chances of surviving a wildfire, but also provides residents a safe escape route in the event of an emergency.

There are many good reasons for reducing flammable fuels and having safe vehicle access to homes. However, growing populations in the forestland-urban interface areas have created an increased risk to public safety. This produced the need to develop large-scale wildfire protection standards and land development ordinances throughout the state of Oregon.

The Oregon Forestland-Urban Interface Fire Protection Act, also known as SB 360, requires forestland landowners to reduce potentially flammable vegetation around homes and to make driveways accessible to emergency vehicles. Driveway requirements under SB 360 make it necessary to remove obstructions over the driving surface, and to create fuel breaks along the fringe of any driveway that is at least 150 feet in length.

Vegetation needs to be pruned or removed to maintain a vertical clearance of 13 ½ feet and a horizontal clearance of at least 12 feet. Also, fuel breaks must be created ten feet on each side of the driveway's centerline.

As an added public safety measure, county land development ordinances have been established for new home construction to help reduce the threat of wildfire to life and property.

In Josephine County, Article 76, the Wildfire and Emergency Safety Standards, requires the same vegetation clearance standards along driveways as SB 360. However, vegetation needs to be cleared 14 feet wide on curves. And Article 76 includes other

driveway standards such as grade, turning dimensions, surface materials, turnarounds, turnouts, and gate widths. These standards can be viewed in the full text of Article 76 on the Josephine County website at www.co.josephine.or.us/files/art_76_final_version.pdf.

In Jackson County, Chapter 9 of the land development ordinance covers the Jackson County Emergency Vehicle Access Requirements. In addition to the vegetation clearance requirements for SB 360, the county requires a minimum driving surface width of 12 feet and increased vegetation clearance on curves. There are also construction standards for driveway grade, load capacity, driving surface, turnouts, bridge width and strength, gate widths,

and signage. To view the details, go online to the Jackson County website at www.co.jackson.or.us/files/chapter_9_5_4.pdf.

Fire prevention is the best protection tool available to landowners. In fire-prone areas such as Josephine and Jackson Counties, standards and land development ordinances have been established to provide landowners with vital prevention information proven to help protect lives, homes, and properties from wildfire. Though some local ordinances apply to new

construction, Senate Bill 360 applies to all homes classified within forestland-urban interface areas throughout Oregon. Forestland residents needing assistance accomplishing their fuel reduction obligations can obtain SB-360 information online at www.swofire.oregon.gov, or by contacting any Oregon Department of Forestry office for a free SB 360 home assessment. Home fire safety information can also be obtained by contacting your local fire protection district. ■ — John O'Connor



The first thing a firefighter looks for when responding to a fire at a home is an address sign. If there are junctions on the road leading to your house, put an address sign at every junction. If you don't have an address sign, you can get one from your structural fire protection district.



Don't make fire trucks stop at the gate. A gate needs to be 14 feet wide on straight roads and 16 feet wide on curves.

It is also important to make sure all bridges on the road to your house can support the weight of fire suppression equipment. A load capacity of 50,000 lbs. is the minimum.

- ☒ Address sign at foot of driveway
- ☒ 12-foot-wide horizontal clearance
- ☒ 13 ½-foot vertical clearance
- ☒ 50,000 lb capacity bridges
- ☒ Good visibility on corners

IN AN EMERGENCY... SECONDS COUNT!



You Can't Predict Tomorrow

As we go through the routine of our daily lives, interacting with family, friends and co-workers, it's hard to imagine how the fabric of our existence might be disrupted. If you tried, you might be able to think of some changes that could happen to your immediate family and circle of friends, but it is exceptionally difficult to imagine an event so cataclysmic that it would alter your life for the foreseeable future.

However, these types of events do happen...and with increasing frequency. Fires, floods and other natural disasters are now occurring with alarming regularity across the US and the world, and the US government admits that it sees no real decrease in the threat posed by terrorists. While personal medical emergencies are usually individual events, they also seem to occur at the most inopportune times.

While we cannot predict the future and know exactly when these events might happen, we can prepare ourselves to be ready for such an occurrence. The READY BOOK™ is an effort by a team of emergency preparedness specialists to mitigate the personal impact that a natural disaster, manmade catastrophe, or medical emergency might have on our loved ones and ourselves.

It is a way to be prepared beforehand, and to be ready for that type of eventuality.

People with access and functional needs, along with families, seniors and others, can now have--at their fingertips--all the personal/medical information that they'll need in case they must evacuate their homes quickly. Among other things, the READY BOOK™ contains emergency supply checklists and personalized I.D. bands to help identify your belongings. The READY BOOK™ also has vital information should you be asked to shelter in place.

The READY BOOK™ can go anywhere and is made of recyclable, waterproof paper. It's available in both English and Spanish, with accompanying refrigerator magnets and window decals to alert rescue workers as to the location of the READY BOOK™ inside your home, apartment or motor home. For more information please call (541) 210-6094, or visit our website at www.myreadybook.com. ■

— Steve Wood



READY BOOK™

Jackson and Josephine Counties Vulnerable Populations Committee

Published by Amalgamated Design Concern LLC

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New Fire Safety Education Materials for Kids

The Rogue Valley Fire Prevention Cooperative and your local fire agency have new fire safety education materials available for your school. The series is designed to assist teachers with the important lessons on fire prevention and safety and ultimately assist fire departments and communities in helping save lives through education. Their new programs are available to assist reaching all age groups. The lessons are designed to enhance your current fire safety curriculum.

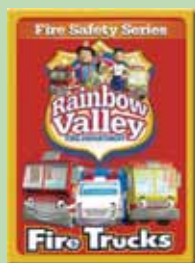
The Clifford the Firehouse Dog Reading Program has been designed to reach K-2 grade.



The books are available to be read to students by their teachers or local firefighters. The

book encourages students to be Big and Help others. There are seven Fire Safety Rules to go over at the end of the book.

The *Rainbow Valley Fire Safety Education* series was designed for the Pre-3 grade. It is divided into nine lessons, each covering important



aspects of fire prevention. Each lesson has support curriculum and activities designed for two age groups, Pre-K and K-3. The nine lessons include: The Fire Station, Fire Equipment, Fire Trucks, What Causes Fire, Home Fire Prevention Tools, Home Fire Escape Plans, Fire in Your House, Stop, Drop and Roll - If Fire Gets on Your Clothes.

The Living in Fire Country field kit has been designed to provide 2ND-6TH grade students with a resource to better understand fire ecology and prepare for a wildfire. Starting with fire chemistry and behavior, the students will have a better understanding of how to prevent, react and understand wildfire. All activities have been adapted to state standards.

I encourage teachers to contact their local fire agencies to set up educational experiences by having local firefighters and educators participate in many of these lessons. If teachers are interested in viewing the facilitator's guide or having a presentation on the educational series, please have them contact Teresa Burkhart at Oregon Dept. of Forestry, Monday-Friday 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. at 541-664-3328 or tburkhart@odf.state.or.us. You can also visit the www.rvfpc.com website to view resources made available to you by local fire agencies.

Thank you for all you do to prepare our next generation for all the possibilities that life can bring. ■ — Teresa Burkhart

AVOID BLACKOUTS WITH

Power Backup

Country living is full of surprises — a chance sighting of a bear, coyote songs at night, and unexpected power outages when a storm rolls in or a wildfire forces the power company to turn off the juice.

Some folks decide they can't wait for the repair crews, and install a backup generator to keep the lights on and the freezer running.

Don and Sandy Shaffer bought a generator for their home on Sterling Creek. Like so many others, the Shaffers fell in love with Southern Oregon during a vacation. They eventually decided to buy land, and they built their retirement home in 1999. They soon realized that whenever the power went down, they'd have no water from their well, and they wanted a dependable water source in case they had to defend their home against wildfire.

"We started looking into our options," Don Shaffer recalled, although it took a few years before they finally got around to actually doing the task.

Make sure your emergency generator has a transfer switch, which keeps electricity from going back into utility lines.

Choosing the right generator can be a bit of a project in itself. There are many sizes and several different fuels, including gasoline, diesel and propane. Some generators have a battery-powered starter; others have a rope starter like a lawn mower. Lightweight units that produce less than 1,000 watts cost a few hundred dollars. Larger, whole-house units can cost as much as \$10,000.

To find the right generator, home-improvement guides recommend adding up all the wattages of every electrical device you intend to operate with your own power. Since electric motors need a larger jolt of current to start, that extra surge of starting current has to be added in as well. Motors for air conditioners, furnaces and heat pumps require large starting currents, and many guides recommend against trying to power them with a generator to hold costs down to a manageable level.

The Shaffers knew they needed a generator that would provide at least a limited amount of 220-volt current to

run the pump at the bottom of their well. They heat with wood, with a heat pump for backup, so they felt no need to buy a generator large enough to heat their house.

"We don't have to worry about freezing to death," he quipped.

After shopping and calculating their power needs, they chose a gasoline-powered generator on wheels that provides 8 kilowatts of electricity and 13 kilowatts of starting current.

It's cost? About \$1,200, he said.

They knew from their research that they would also need a transfer switch in their electrical system to safely use their generator. The transfer switch allows the homeowner to isolate the home from the utility grid while the generator is running. Without the transfer switch, power from the home generator can "back feed" into utility lines, with the potential for damaging equipment or injuring workers.

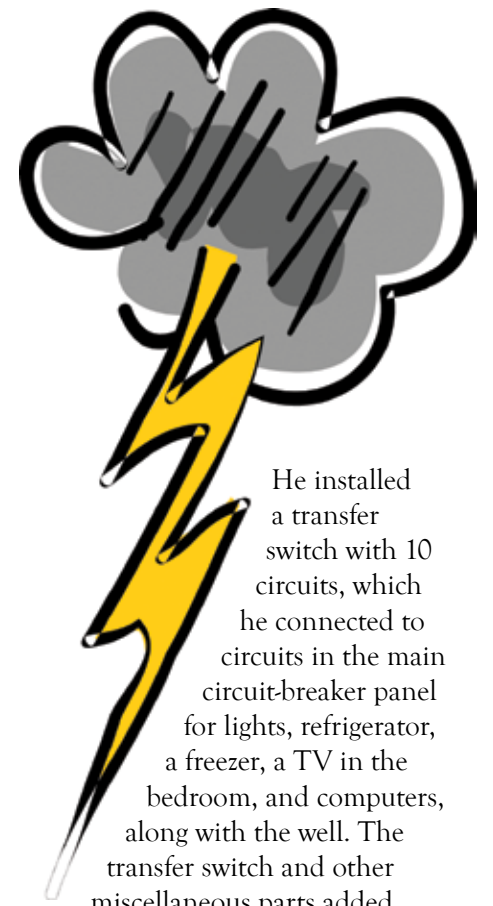
Don's a pretty savvy home handyman, and has worked with electricity before, so he decided to install the transfer switch himself, but he readily acknowledged it's not a project for novices.

"For most people it's a job for an electrician," he said.

His biggest fear was that he might cut an existing wire during installation. Fortunately, the Shaffers documented their home construction with plenty of pictures, so they were able to avoid the wires already in the walls. With hindsight, Don said the whole project would have been a whole lot easier if it had been done while the house was being built.



Unless you're unusually handy, professional installation of an emergency power generator is highly recommended



He installed a transfer switch with 10 circuits, which he connected to circuits in the main circuit-breaker panel for lights, refrigerator, a freezer, a TV in the bedroom, and computers, along with the well. The transfer switch and other miscellaneous parts added another \$300 or so to the project cost, he said.

The generator lives in the garage when it's not in use. When the power goes down, they roll it out on the deck and connect it to the transfer switch. A battery-powered starter makes it easy to get running (one of Sandy's favorite features) although there's a backup rope starter in case the battery fails. They isolate the house from the grid with the transfer switch, start the generator and voila — water, lights and TV.

"It gives us a little peace of mind," Sandy said.

The generator is an integral part of the Shaffers' wildfire-defense strategy. They also have an above-ground pool, a pump and 300 feet of fire hose. The pool provides a large source of water for defending the area around the house, and the generator keeps water coming from their well at a steady 12 gallons per minute.

They take fire protection seriously. "We practice every summer," Sandy said, "but I hope we never have to test it during a wildfire."

During the two years the Shaffers' generator has been on duty, the longest they've used it was about seven hours during an outage last winter. With a seven-gallon gas tank can, it can run for about 14 hours without refueling.

That's longer than most local power outages last, Don said, noting that the generator seems to have given him strange powers he never had before he bought it.

"I can usually make the outage end just by turning on the generator," he joked. ■ — Bill Kettler

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.



Smokey Visits Schools in Springtime



Smokey Bear made his annual rounds to first-grade classrooms in Jackson and Josephine counties last spring, delivering his message that Smokey's friends never play with fire. Smokey and his helpers – members of the Rogue Valley Fire Prevention Cooperative – visited more than 40 schools and reached approximately 3,000 children.

The children watch a video presentation that goes over Smokey's Five Points of Fire Safety. After the video, the children are divided up into small groups and assigned a firefighter. This allows an opportunity to reinforce the lessons shown in the video and allows for a further chance to teach the children about fire safety. At the end of the training the children are visited by Smokey Bear who then gives a poster to each class. Not only is this a fun and educational event for the children, but for the firefighters too. ■



Herb Johnson takes a question from a first-grader during this year's Team Teaching fire-safety blitz on elementary schools in Jackson and Josephine counties. Smokey Bear and his helpers reach approximately 3,000 kids every year to teach them Smokey's Five Points of Fire Safety.



Fire Safety Tips

From Rural/Metro Fire Department

The #1 Cause of House Fires

Can you guess the number one cause of house fires? Believe it or not it isn't children playing with fire; it is cigarettes and the improper disposal of them. In 2009 there was close to \$4.5 million worth of damage to property from fires caused by cigarettes in Oregon. Additionally, 46% of fatal fires are caused by cigarettes or cigars, making it the number one cause of fire fatalities in Oregon.

How do you prevent this from happening to you? We encourage you to stop smoking in bed. Make sure you put cigarettes out in a proper disposal device, like an ash tray. Use extreme caution when smoking while you are sleepy or impaired.

Where there's smoke there's fire. Put it out. Right out. Every time.

Smoke Alarms are Life-Savers

Did you know that of all fire fatalities in the State of Oregon, 49% of the homes either had no smoke alarm or the smoke alarm did not operate. One in four smoke alarms do not operate properly. How do we take care of this problem?

1. You should have a smoke alarm on each level of your home near the bedrooms and where people may be sleeping in other areas of the home.
2. We encourage you to have a smoke alarm in each bedroom of the home.
3. Test your smoke alarms each and every month and make sure they don't have cobwebs or dust on them; this may cause them to malfunction.
4. Depending on your alarm you may need to change your battery once a year. If your alarm has a ten-year lithium battery, it only needs to be

changed when the alarm begins to chirp at you.

5. The entire smoke alarm should be replaced every ten years to ensure proper working order.
6. Never remove the battery from a smoke alarm unless you are putting in a new battery. If available use the hush button to silence false alarms.

By having a properly working smoke alarm in your home, you can increase your chances of escaping a fire by more than 50%.



Preventing Kitchen Fires

One place a fire can start anytime is in the kitchen. Ovens, stove tops and microwaves are all appliances that can contribute to the start of a fire.

Being distracted while using these appliances can also contribute to a fire. If a fire starts in the oven or on the stove top, here are some tips on how to put it out.

1. Never attempt to put the fire out with water or move the pot from the stove.
2. Turn off the heat to the stove or oven.
3. Cover the pot with a wet towel or the pot cover.
4. Never leave food that is

cooking unattended. Don't become distracted.

5. Always have a fire extinguisher available for use in case of a fire.
6. Always turn pan and pot handles away from a child's reach.

Cooking appliances are great tools, however if you are not paying attention a fire can easily start and get out of control before you know it. Remember to play it safe in the kitchen.

The Silent Poison

Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless gas that can cause you to become very ill, or worse, it can kill you. You would never see it or hear it coming. If you recognize the symptoms you may have a fighting chance to escape.

What is the best way for detecting this harmful gas? Well, just like smoke alarms, there are now carbon monoxide alarms. If you have appliances in your home or appliances in an attached garage that run on natural gas or propane then you have the potential of having a carbon monoxide emergency. An alarm helps reduce the chance of injury and gives early detection and warning, allowing you to escape from your home before it is too late.

You should follow the manufacturer's recommendations on how and where to install the alarm.

Carbon monoxide is silent and deadly, but you can prevent harm from happening to you and your loved ones. Install a carbon monoxide alarm today and help prevent a disaster from happening. ■



To report a fire, call 9-1-1

Fire Fatality Statistics

There were 24 civilian fire fatalities in 2010. Of these, 16 were in unintentional residential structure fires, five were in vehicle fires resulting from single-car crashes, and three were suicides. Heating equipment was involved in the majority (6) of the fatal residential fires, and three of these involved portable heaters.

Cigarettes, the second leading cause of fatal residential fires in 2010, are responsible for three deaths.

Unfortunately, the first five months of 2011 saw twice the number of fire fatalities than the same period in 2010. 2011 year-to-date, there have been 20 fire fatalities, including five children ages five and under, in Oregon. Fire causes are still under investigation; however, it appears that heating equipment, in too close proximity to combustibles, will again be a significant cause of fatal fires this year. ■ – Gated Wye

Home Sprinklers

They keep a fire from growing and give residents time to escape before they're overwhelmed by heat and smoke



If you think fire sprinklers are just for warehouses, factories and hotels, it might be time to reconsider. A home sprinkler system could save your life, or the lives of your children.

"Of all the fatal fires I've investigated, I've never done one in a sprinklered residence," says Charles Chase, a deputy state fire marshal in Central Point.

Home sprinkler systems can also provide a significant defense against fire on building sites that are far removed from the nearest fire station or in terrain where fire engines may not have good access. In some cases, installing sprinklers can be a deciding factor in whether a building permit will be issued, says Hugh Holden, fire marshal for Jackson County Fire District No. 3.

"Residential sprinklers are primarily for life safety, but they're often highly successful in containing a (residential) fire until the fire department arrives," Holden says.

Holden learned the value of sprinklers when he wanted to build a house on a narrow lot in Ashland where fire engines would have limited maneuvering space. He agreed to install a home sprinkler system as a condition for obtaining a building permit.

Sprinklers were first installed in factories back in the 1870s, and pressure to require them in public buildings grew after hundreds died in several spectacular fires in the 1940s. Home sprinklers are currently not required in new residential construction in Oregon, but local jurisdictions may require them in some unusual situations such as Holden's.

In Medford, residential fire sprinklers can be proposed as a tradeoff in new construction in some cases, such as where a building site lacks the 20-foot-wide unimpeded access required by the Oregon Fire Code. Sprinklers also can be required in areas where the road is too steep (a grade of more than 10 percent).

Medford Fire Marshal Greg Kleinberg says developers can use residential fire sprinklers for other benefits, such as increasing fire hydrant spacing, providing on-street parking, and increasing the distance of structures from fire department access roads.

Some states now require home sprinklers. Notably, California added a requirement for home sprinklers on Jan. 1, 2011 in all new one- and two-family dwellings and townhouse construction. Prior to the adoption of the new standards, more than 150 jurisdictions in California had a local residential fire sprinkler ordinance, according to the California State Fire Marshal's office.

Home sprinkler systems differ significantly from the units installed in large public buildings. Home systems spray lower volumes of water, and their primary purpose is to keep a fire from growing, giving residents time to escape before they're overwhelmed by heat and smoke.

The goal is provide "tenable" atmosphere for 10 minutes in a room where fire erupts, Chase says. That means keeping temperatures cool enough to prevent the whole room and all of its contents from bursting into flame all at once, a phenomenon firefighters call "flashover." Holden says flashover has happened in less than four minutes in tests conducted by fire agencies.

Holden says people like to think that smoke detectors will alert them to a fire and provide ample time to flee the building safely. Unfortunately, smoke alarms sometimes fail, often because the batteries have been removed. If a fire breaks out at night when people are sleeping, there might not be enough time to get children or frail elders out in time.

Holden and Chase say people have a number of misconceptions about home sprinklers. Movies and television shows have fueled the inaccurate notion that all the sprinklers in a house come on at once, drowning the building in a torrent of water. They note that home sprinkler systems are engineered with a temperature-sensor in each spray head. If a fire breaks out, water will be sprayed only in that room.

People worry about water damage caused by home sprinklers, but they forget that sprinklers use considerably less water than the volumes used by firefighters. Most home sprinkler units are designed to spray about 20 to 30 gallons of water per minute. A fire hose might easily spray 150 gallons per minute into a burning building.

Holden says some people shy away from home sprinklers over fears about malfunctions that could flood their home with water. Holden says the technology of home sprinklers has been improved to the point that problems are "extremely rare." The National Fire Sprinkler Association says the probability of a sprinkler discharging accidentally due to a manufacturing defect is one in 16 million sprinklers per year of service.

Holden says sprinklers don't have to intrude on the esthetics of building design. The sprinklers in his house, for example, are masked with plastic covers like those that cover electrical wiring junction boxes. The sprinkler covers are heat sensitive. The covers shrivel up when exposed to high temperatures, exposing the spray heads.

Cost of sprinklers has been an issue, both in new construction and retrofitting of existing houses. Estimates in new construction range about \$1.50 to \$2 per square foot. Costs for retrofitting existing homes with sprinklers depend on a number of variables, including the size of the building and how it was built.

Some people in the building trades have said requiring sprinklers in new homes would make housing less affordable. Chase notes that many people spend more than the cost of in-home sprinklers on an irrigation system for their yard.

"Which is more important," Chase says. "The sprinkler in your house or the sprinkler in your yard?"

"If you lose a loved one, (the cost of sprinklers) doesn't seem like much," Holden says. ■ — Bill Kettler

GET YOUR SMOKEY ON

When you're ready to put out your fire, use the drown-stir-feel method:

- Pour lots of water on the fire; drown all embers
- Stir campfire ashes and embers with a shovel
- Pour more water on ashes and stir again
- Make sure everything is cold to the touch

Remember – if it's too hot to touch, it's too hot to leave.

ONLY YOU CAN PREVENT WILDFIRES.



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