

# FIREWISE NOTES

## FLAMMABLE FOLIAGE

We focus a lot of attention on large trees as a major source of fuel for wildfires, but the fact of the matter is that just about any foliage is flammable. The prudent thing to do is to consider ANY vegetation a potential fuel for a fire, and put some space between your home and the foliage in your yard.

Walk around your house and take a look at what is planted close to it. Are there tree branches overhanging or touching the structure? Do you have pine needles or shrubs right up next to or against the house or deck? (Junipers are especially hazardous.) Any tall grass or dying brush nearby? If you discover any of these situations, please remove the foliage for safety's sake. Healthy shrubs located away from the structure are generally fine, but do avoid fuel ladders and continuous fuel fields.

## VACANT LOTS and CC&Rs

As noted in an earlier Newsletter article, State law imposes some specific requirements for "defensible space" on lots with structures. But what about vacant lots? That's where local CC&Rs come into play.

West Almanor Community Club CC&R Article 3.19 includes provisions that apply to ALL lots within the community, including the following (paraphrased):

- All trees to have lower limbs removed  
(*minimum of 6 feet of clearance on mature trees*)
- All dead combustible material to be removed from the setback area  
(*generally 15 feet from property lines*)
- All vegetation to be maintained in a neat and natural condition ... to encourage healthy conditions.

Basically, this requires the owners of vacant lots to keep their trees limbed up and the lot clear of dead or dying vegetation, with special attention to the margins around the edge. It's a common sense approach to reducing fire hazards within the community.

## WHAT'S AN "EMBER BLIZZARD"?

Our Firewise Assessment report noted that the most likely scenario for a wildland fire event at Lake Almanor West would be an "ember blizzard" from a major blaze to our south or west. That descriptive term refers to a situation where large numbers of glowing embers and firebrands are carried aloft from a major fire and carried by the wind, settling onto unburned areas where they can start new fires. Embers can be carried several miles, and if they land on easily ignited materials (like wood shakes, pine needles, dead brush, dry grass, debris, etc.), new fires can result.

## LITTLE THINGS

An ember is just a little thing but it has a very large potential for disaster. Sometimes all it takes is an ember encounter with some other little thing to set the stage for tragedy ... little *combustible* things like a collection of dry pine needles on a roof, or an opening in the firewood stack under the deck, or a fiber door mat up against the wood siding.

We can all do our own fire safety inspections by learning how to think like an arsonist. As you walk around your place, ask yourself if you would be comfortable tossing lighted matches onto whatever is lying on the ground. Could you toss a lighted match into vents or other openings in the structure? If you find yourself thinking that tossing matches at your house or in your yard would be dangerous, then maybe something needs to be changed to reduce the hazard.

## OUR ANNUAL DROUGHT

Local precipitation during the past three seasons has been near or above average, reducing the stress on our forested areas. But the climate in this part of the state has a distinct annual cycle from wet to dry, even in "wet" years. We typically get most of our moisture during the November through March timeframe, and receive very little in May through September. In effect, we have an annual summertime drought.

Once the spring surface moisture dries out, grasses, brush and shrubs start to dry as well. Trees generally respond at a slower rate, but they also enter a drying period. The result is increasing vulnerability to fire as the season progresses. Even when we have had considerable precipitation during the spring, our environment is truly ripe for fire by late summer, and it stays that way until the onset of late autumn rain and snow.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

Just a reminder: there is a wealth of helpful fire safety material available to you online. You can access it from the comfort of your home at any time. The following two websites contain basic information for residents in our region and have links to other, wider resources as well:

- Plumas County Fire Safe Council  
<http://www.plumasfiresafe.org>
- West Almanor Fire Department  
<http://www.citlink.net/~westalmanorfd>

And don't forget that the complete Firewise Community Assessment Report and Firewise Mitigation Plan are found on the WACC website (<http://www.lakealmanorwest.org>) under the "Administration" page.