

Working Together to Stay Safe

How to Become a Firewise™ Community in Nevada County



- Getting Started
- Making it a Success

A publication of the
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FIREWISE USA™
RESIDENTS REDUCING WILDFIRE RISKS

BECOMING A FIREWISE COMMUNITY

CONGRATULATIONS on your interest in learning about the Firewise movement and possibly getting involved. Firewise USA™ is a nationwide program developed by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) that has the support of fire agencies, elected officials, and a variety of sponsors.

By everyone's estimate, the Firewise program is our strongest option in mitigating our risks in forested places subject to wildfire. Unhealthy trees, drought, climate change, and increased population penetration into vulnerable environments add an even higher chance of major loss due to fire. But by working together, getting the word out, educating the public, and developing cooperative relationships with fire officials and other partners, we can beat back the threat and significantly lower our risk.

Becoming a Firewise Community is just the ticket for making that happen. Firewise is not a destination but a lifestyle, a change in the way we think and act so that fire safety in forested areas is a continuous activity.

We have many official Firewise Communities in Nevada County and others knocking on the door to get qualified. Before you start a movement in your area, take stock of your capacity to form a Firewise Community:

1. What would be your **geographic boundaries**?
2. How would you **communicate** with people in your area?
3. Do you have a handful of volunteers who could form an **organizing committee** and stay connected to the Nevada County Coalition of Firewise Communities and to the Fire Safe Council for support and ideas?
4. Is there a space in your area, or nearby, where you can hold **meetings or information sessions**? (In some areas, a local restaurant or business makes space available during its off-hours. We can help with this.)
5. Is there already a **homeowners group** that can help?
6. Would your committee have the **time, energy and skills to pull together an annual Firewise Education** event (e.g., a meeting or potluck) for your area?
7. Would you be willing to select and implement **annual Fire Safety Goals** for your community, a process required for annual renewal of your Firewise status?

If all of this sounds daunting, don't be alarmed. Everyone has your back. The Fire Safe Council in Grass Valley (see our website at www.AreYouFireSafe.com) is the organizing hub for the development of Firewise Communities and has a wealth of printed fire safety educational materials. Monthly meetings of the Coalition of Firewise Communities provide information, success stories of what works in other neighborhoods, speakers on topics such as homeowners insurance and grants available for large brush clearing projects, and more. The Coalition can also help find you a mentor-buddy from an established Firewise Community, to answer questions and provide ongoing support.



When you feel ready to start a Firewise Community in your area, take these steps to get going:

1. Recruit 3-6 neighbors to join a Firewise Committee.
2. Study the Firewise materials (you can read a lot on the internet by going to www.firewise.org) and talk about your challenges and issues.
3. Notify the Fire Safe Council about your progress and state that you would like to apply to become a Firewise Community.
4. You will be directed to complete some application forms and materials.
5. Then you will need to wait for the Fire Safe Council to set a date for a qualified expert (accompanied by a few of your committee members) to conduct a fire hazard analysis and visit to your Community. Depending on the size of your Community, the visit may take a few hours or the better part of a full day.
6. From that visit, a comprehensive Hazard Report is written and issued. Be patient because this process may take some time based on available resources. The Hazard Report will give you unique insights into the risks faced by your community and will make recommendations for dealing with those risks.
7. Your Firewise Committee will then need to report-out the key findings in a summary-style Action Plan (typically one page) based on the

recommendations. See below for some goals and project ideas.

Completing the Hazard Report, setting and starting to work toward goals, and conducting your first Firewise Education Day are key steps in qualifying as a nationally recognized Firewise Community. When these steps are completed, you will receive formal notice and signs to post in your neighborhood recognizing your status as a Firewise Community.



Examples of Firewise Community goals or projects in Nevada County

- Scotch Broom pull
- Hazardous property survey
- Community clean-up day
- AmeriCorps team projects
- Information meetings
- Evacuation planning
- Roadside brush clearing
- Putting dangerous properties “on notice”
- Coordinating with local fire officials to enforce defensible space laws
- Removing dead trees and/or dry brush.
- Working with homeowners to encourage purchase of reflective address signs with 4” numbers
- Door-to-door canvassing

STAYING FIREWISE

Good work! Now that your organizing committee has become the oversight group for fire safety work in your official Firewise Community, here are some essential steps for increasing and maintaining your effectiveness year after year.

1. **BUILD COMMITTEE CREDIBILITY.** You are going to be communicating on “all things fire,” so you should have some training to add to your book knowledge. Having a current or retired firefighter on your committee is a big plus. But the best thing you can do is to have at least one of your members attend a “Defensible Space Advisory” training presented by the Fire Safe Council. This is a day-and-a-half program that will give you valuable insights into wildfire behavior, fire prevention, defensible space requirements, fire agency resources, safer landscaping and construction choices, etc. You will also help evaluate defensible space measures that homeowners have taken when you go out in the field. Once trained, you will qualify as an inspector for conducting Defensible Space Advisory Visits for properties in your area. You will now be able to speak with authority and will be taken seriously by the public.
2. **TIGHTEN YOUR MESSAGE.** Firefighters and fire prevention trainers incorporate a lot of fire science jargon into their presentations. While there is much to learn about ignition points, the role of humidity, relative combustibility of different materials, etc., you will be working with a public that can be easily confused and frustrated by too many technical terms. The Coalition can help you keep your message simple, consistent and effective.
3. **DIVIDE UP THE JOBS.** As you get to work in your committee, you will find that some people are just more comfortable with certain roles. Break things up so that no one person carries a heavy load. It's important that you choose one person to be the Fire Safe Council contact so that the office isn't responding to everyone in your group. Identify one or more members who can provide backup for the contact person and, more importantly, create a “pipeline” for future leadership as time goes on.
4. **ATTEND MEETINGS AND EVENTS.** The Nevada County Coalition of Firewise Communities meets monthly, providing new information, updates on local fire issues, and ideas from other communities. As part of the Coalition, you can influence local government policies that affect all of us. Be sure that the rep you send reports back to your committee. Also, the Fire Safe Council holds fundraisers and other events that need our attendance and support.



5. **GAIN SUPPORT OF FIRE OFFICIALS.** Meet with and get to know the fire officials who have jurisdiction over your area, to gain their support for the projects you have in mind. Have them speak at a meeting or during your annual Education Day. Help them to know what you are trying to achieve, and ask for their advice. The public should see that each Firewise Community is working in tandem with firefighters and prevention officers. Fire officials are likely to be more responsive when they are familiar with the work of your Firewise Community.
6. **BUILD BRIDGES.** The Firewise approach includes lots of community education. Learning works best when the message comes from a variety of sources using different techniques. There's plenty of room for the greater participation of local businesses, service organizations, and government agencies. Drawing them in to be part of a totally invested Firewise county is a challenge for all of us. Remember that FIRE IS EVERYONE'S FIGHT.

STAY INVOLVED - STAY ACTIVE

STAY EFFECTIVE - STAY SAFE