



# Firewise Communities®

## "The How-To Newsletter"



*This quarterly provides articles and helpful hints on how to incorporate Firewise principles.*

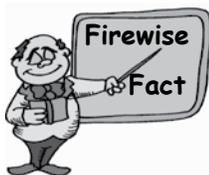
Spring 2006



**W**elcome to the inaugural issue of the *Firewise "How-To" Newsletter*. If you're a homeowner or community resident whose home is located in a region susceptible to wildfires, these newsletters will provide you with timely, pertinent information on how to best protect your home and yourself in the event of wildfire.

### Featured Articles

- Introducing Firewise Communities/USA®
- Fond du Lac Reservation Demonstrates the Benefits of Being Firewise
- Becoming a Firewise Community:
- New Firewise Communities in 2005



*The renewal rate for Firewise Communities is impressive. In 2004, 40 of 41 communities qualified for renewal status. In 2005, 96 of 98 communities did so.*



## THE FIREWISE COMMUNITY

**P**erhaps your family has been living in the wildland/urban interface for generations. Or maybe you're purchasing your dream home close to nature, removed from the hectic pace of city life. Or, you rent your home but are concerned about the risks of living in the wildland/urban interface where wildfires can pose a risk to property and loved ones. No matter which scenario describes your situation, if you're living in or near regions where wildfires are a potential threat, you'll want to know about the Firewise Communities/USA Recognition Program and how its practices can make you and your home safer.

Firewise Communities/USA is a unique opportunity available to the nation's fire-prone communities. Its goal is to encourage and acknowledge action that minimizes home loss to wildfire. It provides you and your neighbors with the knowledge and skills to prepare for a fire before it occurs, while also assuring that you can maintain an acceptable level of fire readiness. Such proactive preventive measures can often prove critical, because when adequately prepared, a house can withstand a wildland fire without the intervention of the fire service. This also enables fire fighters to use their equipment most efficiently during a wildland fire emergency.

The program draws on a community's spirit, its resolve, and its willingness to take responsibility for its wildfire risks, while also providing communities with the resources they will need to achieve both a high level of protection against wildland/urban interface fire and sustenance of ecosystem balance. This issue of "How-To" offers helpful information on how you can bring the Firewise Communities/USA Recognition Program to your community, including specific instructions on how to get started, criteria for the recognition program, benefits of being "Firewise," examples of "Firewise" actions, and relevant resources to aid you in your efforts. For additional information on the Firewise Communities/USA Recognition Program, please visit [www.firewise.org/usa](http://www.firewise.org/usa).



There are currently 147 communities throughout the United States, in 31 states, that have been recognized by the Firewise Communities/USA program. In becoming "Firewise," these communities help assure that their homes will be better protected in the event of a wildfire. To learn how to put your community on the map, keep reading!

## Fond du Lac Reservation

### Demonstrates the Benefits of Being Firewise

Throughout the United States there are communities benefiting from participation in the Firewise Communities/USA Recognition Program. When homeowners and residents get involved, they can help mitigate the impact of wildfires that threaten their community while protecting their property.

The Fond du Lac Reservation in Cloquet, Minnesota, is home to 3,500 members of the Fond du Lac Band of the Lake Superior Chippewa. In 2003, the Reservation became the first tribal area in the nation to achieve Firewise recognition status.

While the tribe had already initiated fuels reduction projects (thinning out small trees and clearing low-lying or dead branches and brush) prior to their participation in Firewise Communities/USA, "we realized we needed the community input and felt the Firewise program was the perfect vehicle for doing so," says Vernon Northrup, a tribal member and employee of the U.S. Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs.

"Our culture has always used fire and we know fire," says Mr. Northrup. "It can be a tool or it can be an enemy. With Firewise, we're better able to address issues of education and prevention within the community."

"The thing that worked best was reaching out to the community and sharing information," says Mr. Northrup. "That garnered the support we needed, not only from the community but from the tribal government as well. Once we got our presentations together for the community, they joined right in to help us set up what we needed to do."

#### Share a Helpful Hint!

Do you have a helpful hint or article you would like to share with others. Send to Firewise Communities, 1 Batterymarch Park, Quincy, MA 02169

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Sam Scranton, Chair of the NWCG Fire Working Team, (right) congratulates Vern Northrup and the Forestry Crew on the Fond du Lac Reservation reaching Firewise Communities recognition status.

"One of the most exciting parts of the Firewise program was the ability to conduct treatments in areas where new homes were being built," says Mr. Northrup. "In partnership with the tribal government and tribal housing authority, we've been able to pre-treat these areas of high fire danger. Plus, the tribe employed Firewise construction and landscaping practices in developing the six homes and a community park. As new sites are cleared, defensible space is developed at the same time, while Fond du Lac Forestry crew performs thinning on surrounding vegetation to further increase safety."



"We drew on every resource we could, including the Student Conservation Association," notes Mr. Northrup. "They were a great help to us, conducting community surveys and disseminating information. With their help, we performed 480 home evaluations – out of 490 homes – over a three-month period."



"Our Prevention Day has been a big success," says Mr. Northrup. "But even if you only have a few people there, you're still getting the message out, getting the program to the people. You can start small and it'll work if you keep plugging away."





## Q & A With Judith Leraas Cook

*Judith Leraas Cook, project manager for Firewise Communities/USA, took time from her busy schedule to answer some burning questions about the program.*

### **HT: How and when was the Firewise Communities/USA program started?**

**JLC:** During the 1990s, some interesting wildland/urban interface research found that homeowners had far more control over their home ignition zone than had been realized. This area includes a house and its immediate surroundings within 100 to 200 feet. The condition of the home ignition zone principally determines the potential for home ignitions during a wildfire. A house burns because of its interrelationship with everything in its surrounding home ignition zone. To avoid a home ignition, the homeowner must eliminate a wildfire's potential relationship with his/her house. This can be accomplished by interrupting the natural path a fire takes--a relatively simple task. Flammable items such as dead vegetation must be removed from the area immediately around the house to prevent flames from contacting it. Also, reducing the volume of live vegetation will affect the intensity of the wildfire as it enters the home ignition zone.

A pilot project was initiated in 2001, through which homeowners could implement "Firewise" practices at the local level. The program was adopted by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group in 2002.

### **HT: What are some of the advantages to a community being Firewise?**

**JLC:** The most important advantage of becoming "Firewise" is that it drastically reduces your risk of losing your home. You and your neighbors work, using the Firewise Communities/USA process, to create a fire break of your community. You will find that there don't have to be huge changes to realize very large rewards. It's a win-win situation for all who take part. But that's not all. Becoming Firewise facilitates community response in any emergency because neighbors have learned to work together. Homeowners have established a relationship with local fire staff, so they can work more quickly and efficiently during a fire.

### **HT: How can individual homeowners encourage participation in the Firewise Communities/USA Recognition Program among the greater community?**

**JLC:** Learning about Firewise means that you have to learn more about wildfire and how it relates to your home. The Firewise web site has a wonderful catalog of materials that are available free of charge, except for shipping. These materials are extremely helpful if you want to talk with your neighbors about wildfire. The video, "Wildfire: Preventing Home Ignition," is often a good starter since it helps people to learn about the home ignition zone. From there, interest often builds quickly.

### **HT: What are the most common obstacles to a community's becoming Firewise?**

**JLC:** I would say that building momentum when many homeowners don't understand that they have control over their home ignition zones is the major challenge. This can be addressed with a good education program. You need to get people interested. We usually recommend staging an event, such as a chipping party or some kind of demonstration. Once people see things happen, interest grows. And when they see how they can do something around their homes, they take action.

### **H-TB: How does Firewise help the homeowner – what's in it for me?**

**JLC:** If you "Firewise" your home, it will create a safe space that increases your home's survivability in the event of a wildfire. And if you can involve your neighbors, too, it's even better for you since the greater number of community members involved, the more effective the fire break can be during a wildfire. There is strength in numbers.

### **HT: What is the optimal size of a community in determining whether to become a Firewise Community/USA participant?**

**JLC:** The program was envisioned to meet the needs of small towns and interface communities in fire-prone areas of the United States. No two communities have exactly the same social dynamics and, therefore, no two communities will be exactly the same size. The size of successful Firewise communities is limited by their homeowners' abilities to collectively participate in reducing the home ignition potential they face and to create and implement their mitigation plans. Larger communities, as a general rule, have more difficulty coming together around how best to address the home ignition zone.

### **HT: Are there any examples of a community becoming Firewise and the impact that had when a wildfire came into or near its area?**

**JLC:** When Firewise Communities/USA was being pilot tested, a community in Prescott, Arizona called Timber Ridge was working with us. They underwent an assessment, created a Firewise Board and developed a plan. Implementation of the plan had begun when the homeowners' association was threatened by a major wildfire burning in the Prescott National Forest. It came right up to the boundary of Timber Ridge. Homes were evacuated for three days. When everyone returned, the fire chief told the residents that he could have brought in his crew to protect the homes had it been necessary because of the mitigation work that had been done.



*Currently, the most common size for a Firewise Community/USA Recognition area is 400 residents!*

### **Coming in the next issue:**

- Replacing Screens, Gutter Maintenance, Watering
- Making the Most of Your Event
- Plan & Act - Part 2 of Becoming a Firewise Community

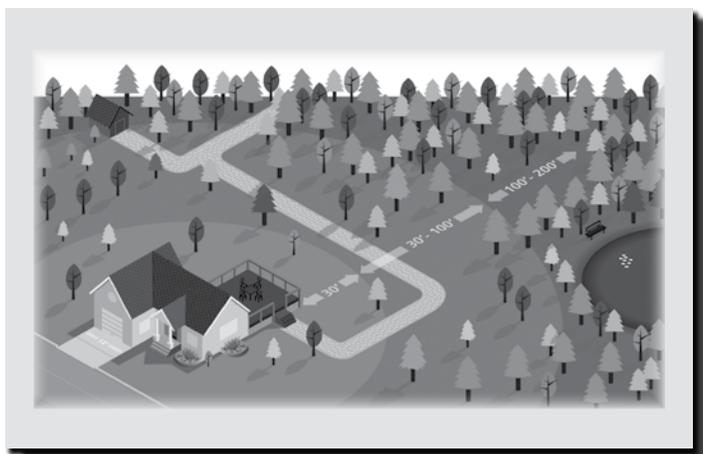
## Firewise Communities as 2006

As of March 2006, 149 sites in 31 states have been designated “Firewise” through the Firewise Communities/USA Recognition Program. The distinction means that communities have met the standards for preparing their homes and community in the event of a wildfire. Of these 149 communities, 50 earned Firewise status during 2005 and 2006, including communities in five new states – Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Montana, and Ohio. The newest Firewise communities include:

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Palominas (AZ)</li><li>• Highland Pines, Prescott (AZ)</li><li>• Groom Creek, Prescott (AZ)</li><li>• Oracle (AZ)</li><li>• The Retreat at Walnut Creek, Pinetop/Lakeside (AZ)</li><li>• Cherokee Village (AR)</li><li>• Eureka Springs (AR)</li><li>• Fayetteville (AR)</li><li>• Bella Vista Village, Bella Vista (AR)</li><li>• Beaver (AR)</li><li>• Cecil, Ozark (AR)</li><li>• Kingston, (AR)</li><li>• Auburn Lake Trails, Cool (CA)</li><li>• Beverly Hills (CA)</li><li>• Forest Meadows, Murphys (CA)</li><li>• Talmadge, San Diego (CA)</li><li>• Cordillera (CO)</li><li>• Muse, LaBelle (FL)</li><li>• Placid Lakes, Lake Placid (FL)</li><li>• Caloosa, Palm Beach Gardens (FL)</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Kinderlou Forest Golf Club (GA)</li><li>• Cave Bay, Worley (ID)</li><li>• Knifley (KY)</li><li>• Cunningham (KY)</li><li>• Bardwell, Cunningham (KY)</li><li>• Poplar Springs, Liberty (KY)</li><li>• Village of Fisher (LA)</li><li>• Lake Road/Glen Echo, Canton (MA)</li><li>• Sorrell Springs, Frenchtown (MT)</li><li>• Bigfork (MT)</li><li>• Elkhorn, Whitefish (MT)</li><li>• Em Kayan Village, Libby (MT)</li><li>• Hopatcong (NJ)</li><li>• Liberty Township (NJ)</li><li>• Warren Grove (NJ)</li><li>• Glorieta Estates, Glorieta (NM)</li><li>• Taos Pines Ranch, Angel Fire (NM)</li><li>• Carolina Lakes POA, Sanford (NC)</li><li>• Alpine Mountain HOA, Black Mountain (NC)</li><li>• Bay Tree Lakes, Harrell (NC)</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Washington Township, West Portsmouth (OH)</li><li>• Brooks Lake Area, Hawkins (TX)</li><li>• McDonald Observatory, Fort Davis (TX)</li><li>• Summer Mountain Ranch, San Marcos (TX)</li><li>• Fort Valley (VA)</li><li>• River Ridge on the Shenandoah, Middletown (VA)</li><li>• Skyline Lakes, Stanley (VA)</li><li>• Tolt Triangle Fire Council, Carnation (WA)</li><li>• Shelter Bay, La Conner (WA)</li><li>• Mt. Dallas, Friday Harbor (WA)</li><li>• Orcas Highlands, Eastsound (WA)</li><li>• Hartstene Pointe, Shelton (WA)</li><li>• Homestead Park, Lander (WY)</li></ul> |
|---|--|--|

## Around the Firewise Home

### Identify Your Home Ignition Zone



The Home Ignition Zone includes your home and its immediate surroundings within 100-200 feet. The condition of your home ignition zone is what determines your home's susceptibility to ignition during a wildfire. It also is the key aspect that you can control in preparing your home for wildfire readiness. Future issues of the How-To News Bulletin will provide details on landscaping techniques in the home ignition zone. For tips on what to do to prepare your home, see [www.firewise.org](http://www.firewise.org).

### Tree Care and Pruning

**Cutting Comments** — With Spring's bloom just weeks away, take a few moments to look over your shrubs and consider pruning them. Cut away dead, damaged or spindly branches to encourage strong growth. If you want to reshape the plant, do it now rather than when foliage starts masking the underlying branches. Even if a plant's shape is fine, you should thin it out to prevent it from overgrowing. The tools you'll need are a small hedge clipper for detail work, pruning shears for general use, and a stout pair of loppers for thicker branches.



**Tree & Shrub Care** — Late winter is the perfect time to take a stroll, with gardening clippers and pruning shears in hand, around your trees and shrubbery. This provides the best opportunity to see the plant's architecture and easier to clean up. In addition, the Spring's rapid growth will cover any unintended cuts from your clippers.

Source: [www.garden.org](http://www.garden.org)

## Much To Do About Mulch

Spring is here and it seems that everyone is outside and involved in landscaping chores. Using organic mulch is a popular way to retain soil moisture but mulching is also valuable as a yard waste management tool. Reasons for mulching include controlling weeds, preventing soil compaction & erosion. Mulching also helps to moderate soil temperature (in summer & winter), reduce plant disease, and to provide plant protection. But, of course, many people mulch around their homes for a better appearance.

### When to Mulch:

- Perennial Beds – Early spring
- Annual beds – when planting or after seeds sprout
- Trees/Shrubs – whenever
- Vegetable sets – when planting & renewing garden
- Vegetable seeds – after sprouting

For more information go to: [www.advancedmastergardner.org](http://www.advancedmastergardner.org)

### How Much Mulch?

To calculate how much (in volume) mulch you'll need to cover to a 1 inch depth, remember that 1 cubic yard will covers 324 ft<sup>2</sup>, and 1 cubic foot covers 12 ft<sup>2</sup>. Use this formula to calculate how many cubic yards (yd<sup>3</sup>) you'll need for your garden and yard landscaping:

$$\frac{\text{Area to be mulched (Feet) X Depth (inches)}}{324}$$

Or check out the handy calculator at: [www.gardenplace.com](http://www.gardenplace.com)

### Remember to be Firewise:

There is no such thing as Firewise mulch, but you can be Firewise in your use of mulch. Organic materials such as pine bark and shredded cypress can be flammable, especially in the hot dry months of summer and early fall. Keep the mulch separated from larger combustible materials, such as lumber and wooden siding. The use of rock or stone next to the house and mulch in a landscaped strip can provide a decorative planting bed separated from the siding or decking, as shown in illustration A. Prune branches well above the surface of the mulch to break up the ladder fuels. To raise the moisture level during peak fire weather periods, consider installing a lawn sprinkler system as shown in illustration B.



Illustration A.



Illustration B.

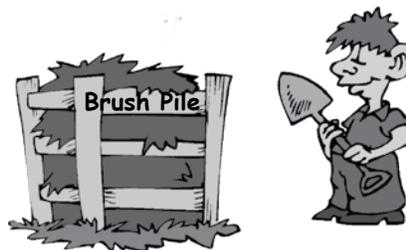
For more landscaping ideas, look in *Firewise Communities: Where We Live, How We Live*. For the cost of shipping and handling only, order your copy from [www.firewise.org](http://www.firewise.org).

## Brush Piles

One of the results of household Firewise activities is brush. Usually ending up in piles around the property. Piles of brush, limbs, branches, leaves and twigs can be beneficial because they do attract wildlife. However, check with your local codes and restrictions because some communities do not allow brush shelters for local critters, and your neighbors might not understand their value.

If you do decide on keeping brush piles for wildlife shelters, consider:

- Use stone piles in your shelter as part of the base to create hiding places and along the edges to



- serve as basking sites
- Give them structure to avoid toppling, or too rapid decomposition
- Make them large
  - 4-8 ft tall by 10-25 ft around
  - With openings inside
  - Exclude predators but allow access to smaller animals.

- Isolated piles are not likely to be used
- Create three or four brush piles per acre
- Plant native vines such as wild grape, honeysuckle, and trumpet creeper
- Rot and decay are a normal process of brush piles

Source: [www.advancedmastergardner.org](http://www.advancedmastergardner.org)

### Remember to be Firewise!

Brush piles are flammable. Keep them at least 30 feet away from your house, out buildings, and trees.

# The Firewise Leader

## Becoming a Firewise Community:

### Part 1 — Getting Organized!

The prospect of becoming “Firewise” may seem daunting, but getting started is actually quite straightforward. The Firewise Communities/USA standards are designed and maintained to offer maximum flexibility in creating the most appropriate plan for your specific community. You will find that the effort expended reaps many rewards.

Ultimately, it all begins with you. Beginning with this issue we will provide a three part series on the steps for communities to follow to become “Recognized Firewise Communities/USA sites.”

- 1) **Contact Firewise** – A community representative – this could be you or another interested member of your community -- completes an on-line request for contact by a Firewise representative on the Firewise Communities/USA web site, [www.firewise.org/usa](http://www.firewise.org/usa).
- 2) **Site Visit** – At an agreed-upon time, your state’s Firewise Communities/USA liaison, a specialist in wildland/urban interface (WUI) fire, schedules a site visit and assesses your community’s specific wildfire risks. The visit is coordinated with local fire officials. The assessment is designed to provide you and your neighbors with information about how wildfire ignitions are likely to occur in your community and how homes could be lost. The assessment will also explain and illustrate the common strengths and vulnerabilities of your neighborhood in terms of wildfire risk.
- 3) **Community Representatives** – At the same time, your community “spark plug” (again, this could be you) recruits community representatives to create a multi-discipline Firewise board/committee. This group should include residents and fire professionals and can also include planners, land managers, urban foresters and/or members of other interest groups. Board/committee members should be informed that development of the Wildland/Urban Interface (WUI) plans will take up to six months.



## Resource Information



### Educational Conference

– Join other communities to share successes and learn how others overcame challenges while implementing Firewise programs at the **National Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Education Conference**, November 2 to 4, 2006, in Denver, Colorado. For more information go to [www.firewise.org/conference06](http://www.firewise.org/conference06).



### Let’s Hear Some Chatter

– Monthly on-line chats, featuring topics relevant to Firewise efforts, have returned to the Firewise web site. Check [www.firewise.org](http://www.firewise.org) for schedule and topics for upcoming chats.

## Benefits of Being a Firewise Community

While the benefits can vary, there are a number of positive outcomes experienced by communities that become members of Firewise Communities/USA. First and foremost, being “Firewise”:

- Creates defensible space that prevents fires from advancing and endangering homes and lives.
- Makes for good neighbors, since the more homes within a community that adopt “Firewise” practices, the greater the impact on reducing the heat and speed of the fire.
- Improves property value while reducing risk of loss.
- Improves community relationships with local fire staff, since firefighters can concentrate their efforts on fighting wildfires rather than devoting often limited resources to protecting homes – which may ultimately be lost if the fire can’t be contained.
- Offers peace of mind, knowing that your home is prepared to survive a wildfire in the event one should occur.



*The national Firewise Communities program is an interagency program designed to encourage local solutions for wildfire safety by involving homeowners, community leaders, planners, developers, firefighters, and others in the effort to protect people and property from the risk of wildfire. The Firewise Communities program is sponsored by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group’s Wildland/Urban Interface Working Team, a consortium of wildland fire agencies that includes the USDA Forest Service, the Department of the Interior, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the International Association of Fire Chiefs, the National Emergency Management Association, the US Fire Administration, the National Association of State Fire Marshals, the National Fire Protection Association, and state forestry organizations.*