

About 40 people attended our FireSafe meeting and walk with Todd Lando, Executive Coordinator for Marin County, on June 29, 2019. Battalion Chief Jason Hatfield and the Fire Captain from San Rafael Fire Department also attended and spoke. They are the team that will respond to any fires in our area. Todd has great knowledge and an informative and entertaining way of speaking. Besides being valuable, the experience was also enjoyable.

The point of FireSafe is to educate us on preventive fire protection measures we can and should take *now*. Obviously, what we hear about the preventive measures to take have been informed by the recent catastrophic Camp, Paradise, and other fires in northern California. New building codes for fire prevention came into effect in California in 2008, after devastating fires in previous years. In the recent Camp Fire, only 50% of the homes built after 2008 burned. *All* of the homes built earlier were lost! The legislature is working to upgrade Fire Code requirements and possibly will require that we retrofit our homes to comply with the new codes.

Todd gave us points to check and a list of steps each of us take to protect our lives and homes. The following is based on Todd's list and the walk we did with him:

[Hardening Your Home Against Wildfire](#)

1. Start with your [roof](#).
 - Is it up to code? It needs to be made of modern roofing material that can withstand fire, i.e. [embers](#) can stay on it for at least 30 minutes without burning through.
 - Keep your roof clear of fallen leaves and debris. If trees overhang the roof, prune them back. Even a handful of leaves can [ignite your home](#).
 - Keep [gutters](#) clear of leaves and debris and preferably protected with screen mesh. I found out that our gutters were filled with foam gutter guard that is highly flammable (and Home Depot still sells these!). We had it removed the next week and are getting guards for the gutters!
2. Clear 5 feet around your home.
 - There should be no plants on the [flammable plants list](#) within 5 feet of your structure. Many plants are [fire resistant](#), use those instead.
 - Remove flammable [mulch](#) within 5 feet of the house. Use gravel or crushed rock instead of redwood bark or shredded mulch.
 - Wood [fences](#) and gates should not be attached directly to the house. Use fire resistant materials next to the house instead.
 - During fire season, replace jute or coir doormats with rubber or metal mats.
3. [Windows](#) should be tempered, dual-paned.
4. Garage doors:

- Garage doors should fit tightly so embers cannot get in between the door and the structure. Use weather stripping to improve the fit if necessary.
 - Garage doors should be insulated and upgraded with backup batteries.
 - Be sure you can open your garage doors to evacuate if there's no electricity.
5. [Vents](#) and [soffits](#) should be screened with metal mesh. Best are Vulcan Vents which close up when heat-activated and don't allow embers into the structure.
- Be prepared to remove [flammable cushions](#) and other items from [decks](#) (hardwood decks resist fire; not so redwood decks).
 - Beyond 5' from your house, maintain a [defensible space](#) of 30 feet or more.
6. Be ready to [evacuate](#) quickly.
- There are [checklists](#) of items and documents to have packed up ready to go on the website of FireSafe Marin that you can use.
 - Make sure you have an AM/FM radio handy since during any shut down of electricity there will be no Wi-Fi and possibly no cell phone connections.
 - If you have to evacuate, close all windows and doors, including the garage, but leave your doors unlocked so fire personnel can shelter in your house if necessary and put out fire from any embers that may get inside.
7. The Safe Zone for Los Ranchitos in case of evacuation is the Fair Grounds by the Civic Center.
- Get the whole family and pets in one car and travel together.
 - Be sure to have a crate for your pets as this is required in any shelter.
 - Get off the road as quickly as you can to leave main roads open for emergency personnel.

The work that you do for your home is a long term investment for the protection of your family home, as these fires are projected to get worse over time. In this regard, I would like to share part of a recent study published in June 13, 2019. According to the research from Stanford Woods Institute for the Environment: “The new normal for the Western wildfires is abnormal, with increasingly bigger and more destructive blazes. ...In 2017 and 2018, in California nearly 3% of the entire state was on fire at some point, an area equivalent to about 80% of Connecticut...The combination of climate change, increasing development in the wildland-urban interface [Los Ranchitos is in the “WUI”!], and the fuel accumulation from decades of fire suppression dramatically increases the risk that fires are large and catastrophic...Unless we get ahead of the problem, fire risk in 2030 or 2040 could make the last few years look calm... In terms of what communities can do, one of the most successful means to prepare individuals for a disaster is coordination at the local level: neighbors, talking to neighbors, and neighbors helping neighbors.” (<https://woods.stanford.edu/>)

—Monib Khademi on behalf of the LRIA FireSafe Team