

Fire Safety – Share the Responsibility

A new and improved look at your fire risk

By Cathy Tyson

With an expected hot and dry summer just around the corner and wildland fires burning in southern California, now is a good time for all area residents to consider what they can do to be as fire safe as possible. Moraga-Orinda Fire District Fire Marshall Tonya Hoover is dedicated to promoting the message, “We believe we all share in the responsibility for our fire safety.”

There are many attributes that you can change that will have an impact on whether or not your house goes up in flames in the event of a fire. These simple things can give a 50% greater chance of saving a home. “If everyone participated we would all have a much better chance of surviving a wildland fire today.”

Moraga-Orinda has a new program called Firewise, a web-based, parcel level evaluation of each individual parcel within the fire district. All the lots within their service area, that includes Canyon, Bollinger Canyon and unincorporated parts of the county, are evaluated and assigned color-coded levels of risk, green - low, blue - moderate, yellow - higher risk, orange – very high, red – extreme risk. A quick glance at the map shows almost all parcels orange and yellow.

“I’m telling readers, look at the site, call me up and tell me if I’m right or wrong. For example if a homeowner put in a pool, after the area was evaluated, it changes the risk dynamic, providing a broader defensible space. I’ll

send a capable Firewise inspector out, and we will reevaluate the property, and we’ll update the website. I want everyone to check their rating, if you don’t agree, call me up and tell me I’m wrong.” Hoover encourages all Moraga, Orinda, and Canyon residents to go to the website, www.mofd.org - click on the Firewise link, and read all about it. “Frequently Asked Questions” is a good place to start to learn how to navigate the program. You can also get information from the Fire Prevention office, (925) 258-4525. Reach Hoover by email to thoover@mofd.org.

Lafayette is served by the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District. Robert Davis, Supervising Fire Inspector, says they are working with Moraga – Orinda on their Firewise program, sending out notices to owners of vacant properties about abatement and surveying property owners following up on abatement. Lafayette is unique in that along with Brentwood, it has adopted an ordinance requiring mandatory automatic sprinklers in new homes when the closest fire station is more than 1 1/2 miles from the home.

“Canyon has been the most pro-active of all our communities,” says Fire Marshall Hoover. “They have communicated with the California Department of Forestry, EBMUD, East Bay Regional Parks, they’ve done training exercise, addressed property owner issues and more. They chose to take one bite at a time on that elephant.

Things you can do to increase fire safety

- Roof – most vulnerable part of the structure, fire resistive roofing is best, Class A and B.
- Defensible Space – Create an area free of seasonal vegetation growth around the structure, for example eucalyptus and junipers are very flammable.
- Spark Arrestor for chimneys.
- Address Visible - day and night from the street that the fire department can read.
- Bridge – if your property is over a bridge, make sure it meets access requirements – 40 tons.
- Eave and Vent Openings – provide protection from embers intruding; install fire resistive screening with openings less than ¼ inch over eave openings and vents



Moraga-Orinda firefighters drill regularly



Photos by Andy Scheck

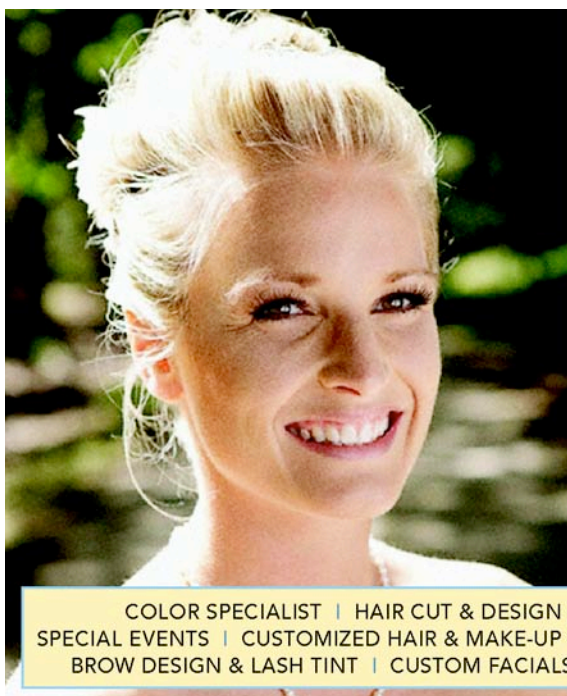
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