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Sleepy Hollow/MOFD Host Firewise Workshop

By Lucy Amaral



From left: MOFD Fire Chief Randy Bradley; Firewise Communities Manager Michele Steinberg; California State Fire Marshal (and former MOFD Fire Marshal) Tonya Hoover; and MOFD Board President John Wyro.
 Photo Lucy Amaral

“We are going to have fires. It’s not if, but when, therefore we must prepare,” said Moraga Orinda Fire District (MOFD) Chief Randy Bradley during his introductory remarks at a Firewise Community Workshop held for the Sleepy Hollow Homeowners Association on January 12.

Bradley said that although it has been 20 years since the Oakland Hills Fire, the threat of that type of conflagration is always there, especially in the Lamorinda area. “Orinda has the same type of construction, fuel models and weather conditions (as Oakland),” he said. On the plus side, however, he also said that Orinda homes are spread farther apart, and the community does have an aggressive fire district. With neighborhood action to create protective areas around their property, he said the chance of homes being destroyed by fire lessens.

More than 60 homeowners attended the workshop to learn what they could do to begin the process of becoming a Firewise Community. Firewise, a program managed by the National Fire Protection Association, focuses on encouraging communities to adopt a long-term, proactive approach to protect their homes before a fire starts. Firewise offers workshops and information to help neighborhoods like Sleepy Hollow develop and implement their own fire mitigation program.

Michele Steinberg, the Firewise Communities Manager, Wildland Fire Operations Division, presented information about the nature of fire, what fires have taught them and what individual homeowners should do to protect themselves.

She emphasized that no fire suppression system can be relied upon to completely stop losses from large-scale fires. However, homeowners are the best, first line of defense and can start protecting their homes well before a fire occurs. She said a number of actions could help reduce losses, such as proper roofing materials, creating a fuel free area around one’s home, removing dead trees and brush, and using fire resistant plants and building materials.

A goal of this workshop was to form a Firewise Committee from members of the Association to spearhead the process of developing their own fire safety plan. Bradley said that while the committee completed its efforts, MOFD would be working on an official evacuation and warning system for Sleepy Hollow and hoped to have that ready in the next six to eight months.

Wayne Hill, co-president of the Sleepy Hollow Homeowners Association, said the event was organized to help get information out about fire safety.

“Our goal was community awareness of how important it is for us to be the first line of defense — especially Sleepy

Hollow, because first responders might not be able to get to us (right away),” said Hill. The Firewise program is a great way to get the rest of the community aware of how we can be the first line of defense in stopping a firestorm.”

Hill said a committee was formed that night and the next step will be for the group to be trained by Chief Bradley on how to assess homes for fire safety. “We want to be able to offer neighbors advice on how they can make the perimeter of the house fuel free and less of a fire threat,” he said. Hill added that he hopes by meeting with the neighbors one on one, they, too, will want to join the committee and carry on the Firewise work.

Bradley said the Sleepy Hollow community is the testing ground for the Firewise program. If results are as successful as he believes they will be, he would like to take this program to the other neighborhoods in the District.

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Solid Waste Rates Likely to Rise

By Andrea A. Firth

The Contra Costa County Solid Waste Authority plans to increase Orinda’s average customer rate by 9.3% due in large part to the fact that residents are producing less solid waste. The Authority’s Executive Director, Paul Morsen, told Orinda’s City Council that residents have heard the recycle message and responded to the financial incentive to move to the smaller blue can contributing to a decrease in revenue for the Authority. Both homes and businesses have been reducing waste and downsizing their bins. A decline in home construction and remodeling over the past 18 months has also contributed to a decrease in commercial service revenue.

Orinda pays among the highest rates of the jurisdictions in the County serviced by the Solid Waste Authority, only El Cerrito and Kensington pay more (see table). It seems that

the hills that are so dear to Orinda’s residents are a large part of the reason the waste rates are on the high side. Morsen explained that with Orinda’s hilly topography, the trucks pull fewer cans per route. In addition Orinda has more hard to serve areas that require a special, small truck. There are five of these small trucks needed to service Orinda versus just two needed for the rest of the District.

Residential 32-Gallon Rate Comparison	
Jurisdiction Monthly Cost (\$)	
Orinda	30.75
Martinez	27.45
Lafayette	24.98
Moraga	23.60
Concord	23.00
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Walnut Creek	17.80


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