

# Lamorinda OUR HOMES

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## Fire Awareness 101:

*What Lamorindans should know about roadways, materials, and escape plans to stay safe*

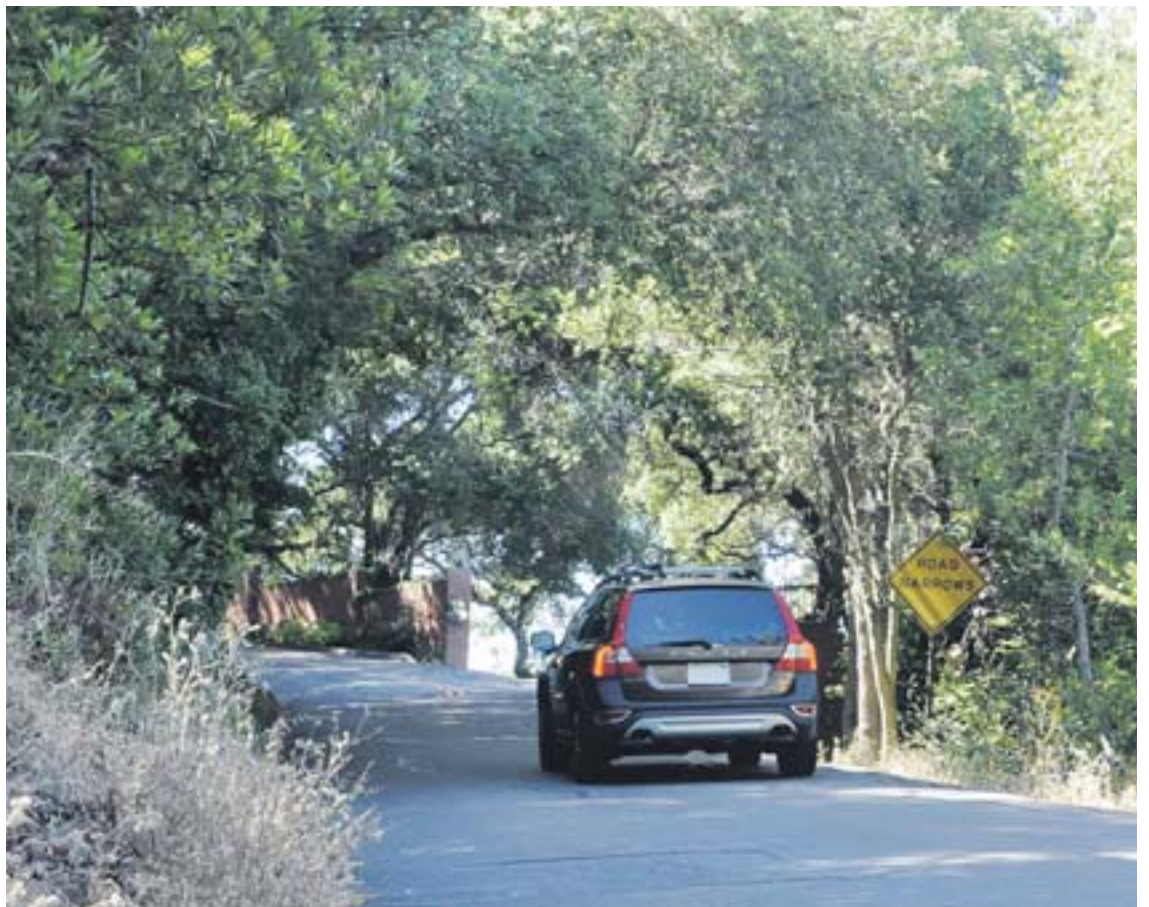
By Nick Marnell, Sophie Braccini and Cathy Dausman

Imagine living in a 4,000 square foot home loaded with the latest in technology, but having to watch the World Series on a 19-inch, black and white television, constantly juggling the rabbit ears to improve the signal, and getting up out of the chair to adjust the volume. Firefighters deal with a similar enigmatic situation as they navigate some of the precarious roadways in the upscale Lamorinda area on their way to a fire or an emergency medical call.

Forty years ago, cars were smaller and fire engines were smaller. When homes were built in the '60s and '70s, larger road width was unnecessary, the slopes were graded much more severely and the required vehicle turning radius was far less. But the roads have not changed with the times. "Lafayette has the potential for the most significant problems in our district," said Contra Costa County Fire Protection District fire marshal Lewis Broschard. "We are dealing with existing, non-conforming roads. If the same subdivisions were built today, those conditions would never be approved."

In the Moraga-Orinda Fire District, the roads in El Toyonal are difficult for the firefighters to navigate. "That area is our number one concern," said battalion chief Sean Perkins.

On a fire call, a large number of responders need to arrive in a short period of time. When the access is difficult, the fire attack and the rescue efforts can be challenging. "If the engines need to park far away, because of the road conditions, it's tougher to get all of the equipment close to the scene," said ConFire inspector Ted Leach. "Plus, after a fire is put out, we need to free up resources



El Toyonal in Orinda is one of the most challenging roads in the district.

Photo Andy Scheck

quickly. And releasing resources on those roadways can be problematic," added Broschard.

Since they cannot change the roadways, the firefighters take extra precautions to familiarize themselves with their first due areas. So if they are dealing with an incident on a particularly troublesome road, such as Hunsaker Canyon Road in



The Home Designer with Brandon Neff...read on page D12

Lafayette, said Leach, they know they will face issues with the roads and the terrain – plus additional obstacles like narrow private bridges and small water mains, which add to the firefighters' challenge.

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