

Fire Awareness 101

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“Park in your driveways,” urged Perkins, to the homeowners on those older roads. There may not be a sign on the road that says ‘No Parking,’ said Broschard, but he posited for common sense. “If you can’t get your car up the narrow, winding hill, around all of the parked cars, how can we do it?”

Homeowners can help the firefighters with a few basic strategies at their residences. “Please be sure that there is a visible address on your property,” advised MOFD assistant fire marshal Kathy Leonard. The inability of the crew to see a house number adds to the response time, especially at night, she said. Trees overhanging the roadway can also be problematic. “We need at least a 6-foot clearance for our vehicles,” said Perkins.

There have been a lot of homes sold recently in Lamorinda, which could mean there will be many new residents living in the area. “Heed the Red Flag Warnings!” was Broschard’s advice.

Perkins offered an even more sobering suggestion: “Watch video from the 1991 Oakland Hills fire to get an understanding of the treacherous situation that can occur.”

And did occur.

- Nick Marnell



A 2-acre vegetation fire in Orinda on June 14 was quickly taken care of by MOFD.

Photo Stephen Healy, MOFD

Fireproofing Your Home

Chief Randall Bradley of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District said it clearly: protecting one’s home against fire danger is the responsibility of the homeowner first.

MOFD and other local agencies are comprised of very qualified personnel, but should the conditions



MOFD personnel conduct a fire assessment at a Moraga home.

Photo Sophie Braccini

be right a catastrophic fire could hit our area and Bradley believes we could lose approximately 200 homes. The chief shared lessons based on scientific fire studies conducted in recent years at a public workshop June 10. It is possible, he said, to protect one’s home and increase the odds that it would not be touched if a wildfire strikes Lamorinda.

“There are big flames, medium flames, and flying embers,” explained Bradley. “Big flames burn trees and propagate at the canopy level; that’s not what causes homes to catch fire most of the time. What are more dangerous are the flying embers that can travel from distant fires, can collect where flammable material is piled or can enter attics through unprotected vents and start a fire.” Bradley presented a video of a home in the woods that was retrofitted for fire prevention.

“The first thing is the roof,” he said. Bradley does not like wood shingles, even the treated ones. Why? “They are made of wood,” he said. He recommended a composite roof. The retrofit also included the siding of the house. Vinyl and wood are not great options;

the best product is fiber cement siding. And there are landscaping steps that can be taken so the fire passes over or around the home.

“Monterey pines, oleander, eucalyptus, are very dangerous in a fire situation,” said the chief. He recommended removing them and replacing them with native trees such as oaks. Lower branches should be removed; of course, dead branches and brush as well. Close to the home, the recommendation would be to plant the least flammable vegetation such as grass that’s well watered, fire resistant plants, or pavement. Wood decks, a wood pile, and wood furniture should not be close to the house.

Still unsure? Call MOFD at (925) 258-4525, ext. 524 to arrange for a free assessment of your home. To find a list of fire-resistant plants, visit www.bewaterwise.com/fire02.html or www.theodor-payne.org/plants/fire_resistant.htm.

- Sophie Braccini

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