

# Defensible Space

I needed to clean the gutters and trim encroaching branches back from roofline and chimneys. Our back slope was largely weed free (we tackled that project last month), earning us kudos, but the area under our pine tree was a bed of needles. I asked about that tree, plus the towering pines in neighboring yards.

“Really watch the [pine] trees,” Leonard said. “Their needles are oily, the drought has made them even more susceptible [to damage and disease] and they only live to about 40 years,” she warned. Diablo Fire Safe Council offers grants to help with the cost of limbing up pine trees, said Executive Director Cheryl Miller.

“It keeps the fire on the ground where it is easier to contain,” she said. “We have had several homeowners work together to target trees that concern them.” Where fire is concerned, “there is no benefit to sugar coating the danger posed to the Lamorinda area,” said Captain George Laing of the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, whose jurisdiction includes Lafayette. “Everybody should be aware that conditions toward the end of summer approximate the conditions found at the time of the Oakland Hills fire.”

Laing said ConFire is glad to inspect home exteriors to determine the hazards posed by a wildland fire approaching a home – the risk of ignition to the home itself and the ability of firefighters to defend that home. Vegetation management is the key to a home’s ability to resist ignition, he said.

In spite of multiple minor infractions, our house exterior was deemed a “good defensible space.” (Whew!) Leonard said she would love to perform more exterior inspections, particularly in the Moraga area.

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Although her staff has been more aggressive this year on weed abatement, Leonard says citing and fining residents won’t necessarily change their behavior. She strives for a balance between public safety and homeowner expenses, but says “at the end of the day, it’s my job to see firefighters go home [safely] at night.”



MOFD Fire Marshal Kathy Leonard (left) and MOFD aide Steven Woods evaluate where leaves could collect on a brush proximity to siding at the reporter’s house. MOFD aide Jessica Misleng shows where leaves could collect on a roofline, increasing fire danger. Photos Cathy Dausman

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Contra Costa County Fire Protection District: [www.cccfcpd.org](http://www.cccfcpd.org)  
(925) 941-3324

Diablo Fire Safe Council: [www.diablofiresafe.org/](http://www.diablofiresafe.org/)

Ember/flame resistant materials:

<http://firecenter.berkeley.edu/bwmg/vents-2.html>



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