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Event focuses on fire prevention and evacuation strategies

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Lamorinda Village, a nonprofit support network for seniors, will host a workshop May 31 outlining the history of wildfires and their impact on the local area.

While the hills are green and beautiful right now in Lamorinda, in a couple of weeks, there will be a shift: hills will be golden and dry - still beautiful, but with an underlying threat.

Adding to the golden hills are the brush and vegetation along the semi-rural bucolic back lanes. Due to advanced firefighting methods, this brush and vegetation has not been cleared by the natural fire cycle and in some areas has grown to heights that reach the trees.

During the fall, when the ground is at its driest, this area experiences fierce north-to-south winds. These dry gusts (similar to the Santa Ana winds in Southern California) come from the hot Sacramento Valley and carry no moisture.

The combination of dry brush tinder, rolling hills of fuel and great gusting winds is a recipe for a colossal fire like those that devastated communities throughout California in recent years.

In order to prevent future disastrous fires, California's Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, known as Cal Fire took a look around California and determined that fuel-reduction (thinning vegetation) along an 11-mile stretch of land at the north edges of Orinda and Lafayette would be one of the top priorities in the state. This designation comes with relief that something will be done but it also reminds us that we are deemed a top priority "High Fire Hazard Severity Zone."

In last year's Camp Fire in Paradise, many of those who perished were elderly or had limited mobility. Emergencies like this present a special challenge to seniors. About 20 percent of the population in Lamorinda is over 65 and that number is growing. Many seniors have set deep roots here having raised children and made lasting friendships in this supportive community. This is home.

Jerry Kent, former Assistant General Manager of Operations of the Park District, will give a visual presentation on the history of wildfires in the Lamorinda area, followed by Dennis Rein of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District, who will discuss the district's top priority, the North Orinda Fuel Break at 1:30 p.m. May 31 at the Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church at 49 Knox Drive in Lafayette. Local law enforcement will also be present to discuss prevention and evacuation plans. For the residents of Lamorinda, especially seniors, awareness and preparation will hopefully give us an advantage.

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