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## MOFD chief proposes aggressive, radical fire code

By Nick Marnell



A lot of work needs to be done around this structure under the newly proposed fire code.  
Photo Andy Scheck

construction.

But probably the most drastic proposed regulation is a ban on the use of combustible ground cover, including mulch, within 2 feet of each district structure, and that all vegetation must be trimmed within 2 feet of each structure.

"It will have a dramatic impact on how homes look," said Winnacker, noting that a reduced fire threat cannot coexist with a fully vegetated, semirural community. "You can't have both."

Included in the code is the requirement for an exterior fire hazard inspection within six months prior to the sale or transfer of real property. Winnacker had been frustrated with the lack of effort in bringing parcels up to code, especially those along district evacuation routes, and he proposed this regulation to ensure that weed abatement is completed before a property changes hands.

Other highlights of the code include an increase in tree clearance from 5 feet to 6 feet around a structure, the requirement of exterior under-eave sprinklers for new construction and an increase in road width up to 28 feet for new construction.

The district will coordinate the adoption of the code among the MOFD board, the two district municipal councils and the Board of Supervisors. All four governing bodies must adopt the code to ensure uniformity of standards within the MOFD jurisdiction. If one entity makes a change to the proposed ordinance, the fire code must go back to all four for adoption of the same change.

Winnacker said he hoped to complete the process by the end of February, and the new code would take effect immediately. As it will be impossible to inspect all 14,000 district parcels in one year, the chief said his top two enforcement priorities for 2020 are the roadsides along district evacuation routes and properties that lie along the perimeter of wilderness areas.

Before the fire code is sent to the governing bodies, the district will hold another public meeting Jan. 28 at Joaquin Moraga Middle School in Moraga. "It's not necessarily to convince people why this needs to be done, but to explain what we are proposing," Winnacker said. "These recommendations come from my professional opinion about how we can create the greatest increase in fire safety at the lowest possible cost and lowest impact to the district."

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