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Published July 20th, 2022

Lafayette neighborhoods have new ConFire Firewise liaison

By Jennifer Wake



Many Lamorinda neighborhoods sit atop hillsides like this one high above Springhill Elementary School in Lafayette. Photo Jennifer Wake

Wildfires grow in strength as they run uphill and a fire in steep and hilly terrain makes it difficult to access with a fire truck or even on foot, according to the National Fire Protection Association. "If your home or neighborhood is remote from water supplies and has narrow, winding roads and driveways, it is especially challenging to fight fire at each structure," states the NFPA. "If dozens of homes in your area are threatened, chances are there are not enough firefighters, fire trucks, or water supplies to protect every home."

The NFPA also notes most homes that burn during a wildfire are ignited by embers or firebrands landing on the roof, in gutters, on or under decks and porches, or in vents or other openings in the home. Other homes burn from small flames (surface fire) that can touch the house - such as dry grass that can allow a fire to run right up to the siding.

The Firewise USA communities program encourages local solutions for safety by involving homeowners in taking individual responsibility for preparing their homes from the risk of wildfire.

One of the biggest benefits of being part of a Firewise neighborhood, according to Lafayette Council Member Wei-Tai Kwok who coordinated homeowners in his neighborhood to become Firewise, is having a fire inspector come to homes in high fire hazard severity

zones and let homeowners know what they need to do to meet fire code standards, without the fear of receiving a citation.

At Lafayette's July 13 Emergency Preparedness Commission meeting, Kwok and other EPC members discussed ways to educate the public about the benefits of becoming Firewise, and increasing the number of neighborhoods involved in the program. Lafayette currently has four recognized neighborhoods, while Moraga and Orinda have 25.

The Contra Costa County Fire Protection District has a new Firewise Liaison, Chris Giddis, who is taking over for Inspector Taylor King who moved to a different city. According to Kwok, who recently had a 90-minute meeting with ConFire Chief Lewis Broschard and Deputy Fire Chief Aaron McAlister, Giddis is in place now and is ready to offer support.

Kwok said insurance companies look favorably at homes in Firewise neighborhoods, adding that Lafayette high fire hazard severity zones are predominantly north of Highway 24 or near Lafayette Reservoir.

Emergency Preparedness Commission Chair Duncan Seibert noted that there is a Firewise form available on the CERT website (below) that can be completed and will help track where there is interest in creating Firewise neighborhoods in Lafayette.

For more information about Firewise, visit www.lamorindacert.org/resource/firewise-usa/

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