

Cascade Canyon Firewise® USA Neighborhood

Community Development Model

Purpose of this Document:

Because our neighborhood of 500+ homes has had some success in community organizing for fire safety, we were asked to compile a list of steps that we took to create our team. This document is not about fire safety efforts and education, but rather it is a plan for organizing a FireWise group.

We recommend starting, as we did, with a small group of neighbors, and assessing:

What your individual goals are

How much time you can contribute on a monthly basis

What skills you bring that you can contribute on a regular basis.

Each town, neighborhood, and community group is different. You will find your own strategies and volunteers. We are writing this document so that you have a general idea of some of the plans and projects ahead of you. Also, we can help you as you proceed.

Brief History of the Cascade Canyon FireWise Working Group

After a large fire safety meeting in the Fall of 2017, a small group of Cascade Canyon neighbors started meeting to discuss ways to reduce our neighborhood's wildfire hazards and improve our fire safety awareness. We became an official Firewise® USA site in March 2018.

We were lucky, in that we had about eight dedicated members who were willing to devote 1-4 hours a week to establish a systematic education plan for our neighbors. The five hundred homes in our watershed are in the Wildland-Urban Interface. We are motivated!

We describe the steps in creating such a team below. Please do not be intimidated by the list of projects we have taken on; start slowly and your own plan will develop organically, out of your volunteers' skills and time commitments, and out of your community needs.

Cascade Canyon Firewise Development Summary:

Please note: The dates listed are more useful to identify stages of group development, as some of these projects were developed over many months.

September to December 2017. Initial Phase. Beginning the Journey

Planned regular meetings

Began to understand volunteer roles in our group, and the needs of our community

Began our own fire safety education

Developed our approach to group leadership and organization structure

Decision Making (by voting, majority rules, striving for consensus)

Started community development (neighbor to neighbor contacts)

Explored local/ national websites for fire safety tips for homes and our neighbors

January to June 2018. Phase Two. Consolidation

Established and clarified individual roles in the group

Tested outreach methods to the community

Began long range planning and goal setting

Developed a monthly newsletter and a database of neighbors interested in fire safety

Began application process for Firewise Certification, using existing models of applications and existing local documentation of fire dangers.

Developed local materials and information on fire safety for distribution

Created and participated in regular community meetings and activities:

neighborhood walks to review defensible space, for fire safety

annual chipper days, to remove bushes and limbs from streets

monthly newsletter

town-wide information meetings

neighborhood block parties and educational gatherings

- local parades and festivals Parade where we distributed our literature

small and large scale evacuation drills

July 2018—into the Future. Phase Three. Expansion and Systematizing

Increased efforts at town, county and state level to direct more resources to fire safety

Renewed our annual Cascade Canyon Firewise® USA status

Continued refining and developing all projects listed above

Conclusion: For those of you who are starting a Firewise Community Project

Of course part of our success in organizing is due to the increasing fire risk in our neighborhood. We have focused on community building, within our working group, and in our neighborhood. Small things, like having food at our meetings, and a short time to gather to say hello, help keep us connected and motivated. These efforts also reduce personality struggles, which can arise in working groups.

People are terrified of fire, and rightly so; in our presentations we have tried to give accurate information, and also help people connect face to face with their neighbors. One of our members said, "We protect what we love."

We believe that one or two dedicated leaders, who can devote consistent time to the FireWise project, can have a huge positive impact on their community. A small start, carefully organized on a human scale, will draw people to it.

Groups and volunteers have a tendency to take on too much and become frustrated and exhausted. Remember, this is a decades-long process of community development.

Please contact us if you want help sorting out where to start and what to do next.

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