



Wildfire Preparedness in Sonoma Valley

Fire officials point out that it is not a matter of “if” Sonoma Valley has another wildfire, but “when”. Our job as a community is to mitigate the consequences. Fires eliminate the time to make decisions. Preparation only works before fire arrives.

The Valley contains moderate risk, high risk and very high-risk fire zones. Defense starts at home. Firefighters bring the offense, but wind-driven embers can outrun even the fastest response — and that’s how our biggest fires have started. Properties that have prepared present less risk than those that haven’t. We can’t control wildfires, but we can control preparedness. Improving the fire resiliency of your property helps the Valley be better prepared.

Many people believe wildfire travels from burning one property to then reaching the adjacent property. That can occur, but the far more prevalent way wildfire spreads is via embers. The following short videos address this:

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/GphGjcs0M5o>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M9sel3wcBLg>

Embers cause the majority of wildfire home ignitions. We can mitigate the effects of embers. Key actions include the following:

1. No combustible vegetation or material within five feet of your house.
2. Cover all vents with 1/16” or 1/8” screen mesh.
3. Clean gutters of leaf and other debris.
4. Wood fences should not be attached to or within 8’ of your dwelling.
5. Decks within 10’ of the building should be of noncombustible material and all combustible items beneath the deck should be removed.
6. Dead trees and vegetation should be removed, and trees limbed up 6-8 feet.

7. Avoid use of wood chips, arbor mulch, and especially bark which can easily become embers.
8. Weed whack grass before fire season and keep it no higher than 4 inches after the initial cutting.

At least 100 feet around your house, it is advised to remove all dead vegetation and limb up trees 6-8 feet off the ground. Manzanita, low conifers and other highly flammable vegetation should be thinned or removed near buildings.

The Sonoma Valley Fire Department (SVFD) offers very useful, cost-free inspections of your homesite. The results of these inspections are helpful and confidential, and you can schedule an SVFD inspection via the following website:

(<https://svfdfireinspection.as.me/?appointmentType=69479463>)

SVFD has advised that, if you stack the vegetation cleared from your property adjacent to the road, they can arrange for it to be chipped at no cost. Contact SVFD for more information if you are interested in this.

Finally, know your fire evacuation zone so that, if and when evacuation is recommended or mandated, you know which zone you are in. See the map below.

