

# Where's the Fire?

Wise choices make safe  
communities

Center for  
Urban Forest Research





# FIREWISE IS FIRESAFE...

Wise decisions around your home can make you and your community safer from fire.



It may look like South Lake Tahoe is safe from fire. After all, there are fire stations, wide roads, and plenty of water. But things are not as safe as they may seem.

1. Notice how the plants in this yard could carry a fire quickly and easily to the house and up into the treetops. This is not firewise or firesafe.

2. This yard is firewise and firesafe since many plants have been cleared away. Yet, the homeowners still enjoy tall trees and greenery around their home.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

The small lots found in South Lake Tahoe and the lack of compliance with California's fire safety laws mean a significant fire risk to the whole community, despite the fact that the city has fire-fighting resources available.

While making your own property firewise is the first step, becoming fire safe is not always something you can do alone. It requires the active participation of all homeowners and businesses in the community.

### REDUCE YOUR RISK

- Reduce your risk by making your own property fire safe.
- Reduce your risk further by encouraging your neighbors to make their properties fire safe, too.
- Contact the local, state, and federal fire agencies in your community if you have questions or concerns (see back page for local contact information).



## RESEARCH FINDINGS

A recent study in South Lake Tahoe found that:

- 66% of properties are non-compliant with California fire safety laws for landscape maintenance.\*
- 86% are non-compliant for defensible space.\*
- 57% are non-compliant for landscape maintenance and defensible space combined.

\* See *The Bottom Line* (below) for descriptions of maintenance and defensible space.

## SMALL LOTS, BIG RISK

- You can increase your odds of surviving a wildfire if you, as a homeowner, make your property firewise.
- If you have a small or narrow parcel, even if it is firewise, you are less safe from fire if your neighbors are not also firewise.
- Since the majority of properties in the city are narrow and not compliant with fire safety laws, the whole community needs to work together to make South Lake Tahoe a firewise and safer place to live.

This home is safer because it is firewise. It has a well-maintained yard, a clean, fire-resistant roof, and plenty of defensible space.

## MAKE YOUR PROPERTY FIREWISE (AND FIRESAFE)

### PROPERTY MAINTENANCE

- replace wood roof with fire-resistant roofing material
- clear pine needles and other debris from the roof and gutters\*
- install a spark arrestor on chimney outlets\*
- remove branches that are within 10' of chimney outlet\*
- enclose eave overhangs and decks
- cover all vents with 1/4" or smaller wire mesh
- install double- or triple-paned windows
- make sure your street numbers are reflective and visible
- irrigate your yard

### DEFENSIBLE SPACE

- clear vegetation that will carry a fire to the house or treetops for a distance of 30' from the house\*
- remove dead and dying branches and trees\*
- prune low-hanging live branches and shrubs to prevent fire from spreading from the ground to the tops of trees\*
- do not store anything flammable, including wood, underneath decks
- keep woodpile 30' away from house if possible
- keep grass cut to below 18" tall

\* Items required by law



## Resources

USDA FS LAKE TAHOE BASIN  
MANAGEMENT UNIT  
(530) 573-2600

CAL. DEPT. OF FORESTRY &  
FIRE PROTECTION (CDF)  
(916) 653-5123

SOUTH LAKE TAHOE FIRE DEPARTMENT  
Non-emergency number: (530) 542 6160

STATEWIDE FIRESAFE COUNCIL  
[www.firesafecouncil.org](http://www.firesafecouncil.org)

LOCAL COUNCILS  
[www.firesafecouncil.org](http://www.firesafecouncil.org)  
(click on local councils)

CALIFORNIA FIRE ALLIANCE  
[www.cafirealliance.org](http://www.cafirealliance.org)

FIREWISE INFORMATION FOR HOMEOWNERS

- [www.firewise.org](http://www.firewise.org)
- University of California Forest Products Lab  
[www.ucfpl.ucop.edu](http://www.ucfpl.ucop.edu)
- "Homeowner's Watch-outs"—an informative brochure on making your property firewise  
[www.deervalleyexpress.com](http://www.deervalleyexpress.com)

## References

de Jong, L. 2002. *Improving Fire Hazard Assessment at the Urban Wildland Interface: Case Study in South Lake Tahoe*. Internal Report Fire-I, Center for Urban Forest Research, Davis, CA. <http://cufr.ucdavis.edu/>

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# FIRE SAFETY—

## Not just smart, it's the LAW!

### California Public Resources Code 4291 (PRC 4291) says:

Any person that owns, leases, controls, operates, or maintains any building or structure in, upon, or adjoining any mountainous area or forest-covered lands, brush-covered lands, or grass-covered lands, or any land which is covered with flammable material, shall at all times do all of the following:

1. Maintain around and adjacent to such building or structure a firebreak made by removing and clearing away, for a distance of not less than 30 feet on each side thereof or to the property line, whichever is nearer, all flammable vegetation or other combustible growth. This subdivision does not apply to single specimens of trees, ornamental shrubbery, or similar plants which are used as ground cover, if they do not form a means of rapidly transmitting fire from the native growth to any building or structure.
2. Maintain around and adjacent to any such building or structure additional fire protection or firebreak made by removing all brush, flammable vegetation, or combustible growth which is located from 30 feet to 100 feet from such building or structure or to the property line, whichever is nearer, as may be required by the director if he finds that, because of extra hazardous conditions, a firebreak of only 30 feet around such building or structure is not sufficient to provide reasonable fire safety. Grass and other vegetation located more than 30 feet from such building or structure and less than 18 inches in height above the ground may be maintained where necessary to stabilize the soil and prevent erosion.

3. Remove that portion of any tree which extends within 10 feet of the outlet of any chimney or stovepipe.

4. Maintain any tree adjacent to or overhanging any building free of dead or dying wood.

5. Maintain the roof of any structure free of leaves, needles, or other dead vegetative growth.

6. Provide and maintain at all times a screen over the outlet of every chimney or stovepipe that is attached to any fireplace, stove, or other device that burns any solid or liquid fuel. The screen shall be constructed of non-flammable material with openings of not more than one-half inch in size.

7. Except as provided in Section 18930 of the Health and Safety Code, the director may adopt regulations exempting structures with exteriors constructed entirely of nonflammable materials, or conditioned upon the contents and composition of same, he may vary the requirements respecting the removing or clearing away of flammable vegetation or other combustible growth with respect to the area surrounding said structures.

No such exemption or variance shall apply unless and until the occupant thereof, or if there be no occupant, then the owner thereof, files with the department, in such form as the director shall prescribe, a written consent to the inspection of the interior and contents of such structure to ascertain whether the provisions hereof and the regulations adopted hereunder are complied with at all time.

We conduct **research** that demonstrates new ways in which **trees add value** to your community, converting results into **financial** terms to assist you in stimulating more **investment in trees**.