

SECTION IV: PRE-FIRE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

A: FIRE PREVENTION

The Wildland Urban Interface presents major concerns for fire prevention. Many homes are located in hazardous locations either in ignorance of, or in disregard for, fire prevention practices. Strict enforcement of California Public Resources Codes 4290 and 4291 will be necessary to correct the errors of past residential and commercial developments. Fire loss reductions must be gained through better fire safe planning, with participation by all political bodies and stakeholders.

The Fire Prevention Program of the CAL FIRE Mendocino Unit, including the Fire Prevention Bureau, Vegetation Management Program, and Pre-Fire Engineering, attempts to address the actual problems encountered and to plan for anticipated changes.

Unit prevention efforts include fair exhibits, burn and 4290 permit procedures, fire patrols, news media releases, public service announcements and outreach, school programs, structure and dooryard premises inspections, and membership in the Mendocino County Fire Safe Council. Fire prevention programs are coordinated to the greatest extent possible with local fire departments.

Each area of the Mendocino Unit, to a greater or lesser extent, will need to adapt to the ever-increasing population moving into and recreating in the wildland areas of the County, posing greater risks of fires and even greater expectations for all CAL FIRE response services. Through development, implementation, and ongoing reassessment of this Plan's priorities, the Mendocino Unit will be ready and steadfast in its ability to provide leadership in pre-fire management planning and in protecting the citizens of Mendocino County from destructive wildfires.

HISTORY OF LARGE FIRES

The "Exhibits Section" of this fire plan contains a map of most of the large fires in the Mendocino Unit since 1922. This information can aid in understanding the potential for a large fire at any particular location and also help in determining areas where pre-fire management plans can be put to the best use. One thing this fire history makes clear is that, although the County has been spared large fires in the recent past, this Unit can and may sustain large, devastating wildfires. *Indeed, the lack of large fires for many years points to the likelihood of one or more happening in the near future.* To prepare and lower the risks now will benefit all stakeholders concerned.

IGNITIONS AND INITIAL ATTACK SUCCESSES

Historically, the largest single **known** ignition cause in the Mendocino Unit has been the use of equipment, followed by escape debris burning. Most ignitions are associated with roads and areas of population density. Identifying ignition causes is an ongoing challenge, and results in many fires being undetermined or having several potential reasons for a fire's start. An example is determining if roadside ignitions were accidental due to cigarette butts negligently tossed from vehicles or were acts of arson. The need for accurate data to perform good analyses is crucial and the Unit personnel are committed to meeting this challenge. To accomplish this, Unit

personnel are continuously training and attending classes to heighten their abilities to investigate fire origin and causes. CAL FIRE Unit suppression forces, working side-by-side with local fire departments, have been successful in meeting the CAL FIRE goal of containing 95% of all wildfires at 10 acres or less. The coordinated effort of ground and air suppression resources has proven a winning combination for many years, and CAL FIRE along with local fire personnel will work hard to maintain their good record and superb mutual aid relationships.

ENGINEERING & STRUCTURE IGNITABILITY

In the early 1980's, the California legislature adopted "Fire Safe" regulations in response to devastating fires on California's wildlands. California, because of its unique combination of vegetation, topography, climate, and population, has one of the most severe wildfire problems in the world. Rugged terrain and highly flammable vegetation make the foothills and mountains of California especially unsafe for residential development unless adequate fire safety measures are taken. A fire hazard severity classification system based on fire weather, fuel loading, and slope has been developed as a basis for identifying fire hazard in the State Responsibility Areas (SRA) where CAL FIRE has the primary responsibility for wildfire protection. To help aid in successful protection CAL FIRE plays an active role in the development of Fire Safe regulations. These regulations provide direction and set standards for construction of adequate ingress and egress routes, water systems, land use planning and zoning to help guide development within the SRA.

The intent of the Fire Safe program is to minimize the loss of lives, structures, and resources due to uncontrolled wildfires. The Fire Safe program places some of the responsibility of fire protection on the homeowner and/or builder/developer. The responsibility is the concept of defensible space planning and incorporating basic fire protection measures into the home or development as it is built. Each home, subdivision, and development constructed in the SRA should have adequate emergency equipment access, building, street, and address identification, and a reasonable water supply for suppression needs built into their designs. Residents and planners within the SRA should understand the importance of planning for fire protection, the need for ongoing and proper clearance of flammable vegetation around structure (PRC 4291), and the benefits of greenbelts, fuel breaks, and controlled burns in and around structures and developments.

Currently, proper addressing of structures in the SRA is the single biggest hurdle to overcome in the Fire Safe Program. Mendocino Unit personnel continue to educate the public on the vital importance of address signage in order to facilitate locating a fire and to avoid delays in response.

Public Resources Code (PRC) 4290 and Title 14 Code of California Regulations

"These regulations have been prepared and adopted for the purpose of establishing minimum wildfire protection standards in conjunction with building, construction and development in SRA. These regulations became effective September 1, 1991. The future design and construction of structures, subdivisions and developments in SRA shall provide for basic emergency access and perimeter wildfire protection measures. These measures provide for emergency access; signing and building numbering; private water supply reserves for emergency fire use; and vegetation modification." *The intent statements that follow are a summary and are provided for information only. Specific requirements should be obtained from the local planning and building departments.*

The implementation of these regulations occurs through the local government building permit and subdivision map approval process. Local government is still the approving authority for development. These regulations are triggered by the application for a building permit for purposes other than limited remodels. These regulations do not supersede existing local regulations that are equal to or more stringent than the state regulations. CAL FIRE has been given the role of wildland fire protection expert and is provided the opportunity to review and comment on all proposed construction and development within the SRA. CAL FIRE also performs final onsite inspections to determine if owners have met the intent of the fire safe regulations. The county is granted the authority to make the final ruling. Locally developed rules are more responsive to the local constituency and local environmental conditions. They can be finely tuned to local wildfire suppression strategies and needs. The proposed local rules must provide for the same practical effect as the overall state regulation package. Each protection measure and activity cannot be judged alone, but must be compared to the overall protection provided by the total regulation package.

Public Resources Code (PRC) 4291

Property owners in mountainous areas, forest-covered lands or any land that is covered with flammable material must create at minimum a 100-foot defensible space (or to the property line) around their homes and other structures, as mandated by California PRC 4291.

The state legislature enacted PRC 4291 to improve fire safety and to help prevent catastrophic fires. Under the law, property owners or those who control a property must establish a:

- 30-foot clean zone (or to the property line).
- 70-foot reduced fuel zone (or to the property line)



This does not mean the property must be clear-cut to bare soil, it involves thinning and breaking up the continuity of ladder fuels and large areas filled with contiguous shrubs that can readily transmit fire.

Title 19 Code of California Regulations

This important title includes the regulations from the Office of the State Fire Marshall, the Office of Emergency Services and the Seismic Safety Commission, information includes but is not limited to:

- General Fire and Public Safety Standards
- Fire Alarm Systems and Devices
- Fire Extinguishers and Automatic Fire Extinguishing Systems
- Fireworks and Explosives

- Transportation of Flammable Liquids
- Oil Refinery and Chemical Plant Safety Preparedness Program
- Emergencies and Major Disasters Programs and Procedures
- Hazardous Material Release Prevention, Reporting, Emergency Response

Title 24 California Code of Regulations

The California Building Standards Code, Title 24, which incorporates the California Fire Code, is adopted every three years by order of the California Legislature with supplements published in intervening years. Title 24 mandates specific requirements for new building construction placing strong emphasis on proper address signage, apparatus access, water requirements, and defensible space.

Building inspections

The California Building Commission adopted the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) codes in late 2005 (Building Standards and Materials for Building Code Chapter 7A). The majority of the new requirements took effect in 2008. These codes included provisions for ignition resistant construction standards in the wildland urban interface. The building standards and materials codes are enforced by the California Building Standards Commission and, in Mendocino County, the Mendocino Building Department. The fire hazard severity zones are used by building officials to determine appropriate construction materials for new buildings in the wildland urban interface. The zones can also be used by property owners to comply with natural hazards disclosure requirements at time of property sale.

The Wildland Urban Interface presents major concerns for fire prevention. Many homes are located in hazardous locations either in ignorance of, or in disregard for, fire prevention practices. Strict enforcement of California Public Resources Codes 4290 and 4291 is necessary to correct the errors of past residential and commercial developments. Fire loss reductions must be gained through better fire safe planning, with participation by all political bodies and stakeholders.

MEU Pre-Plans

- MEU lightning plan
 - On file in MEU Emergency Command Center
- El Dorado Estates/Deerwood Estates Pre-Plan
 - On file within Battalion 3
- Brooktrails Evacuation Pre-Plan
 - See http://www.btcsd.org/about_us/fire_dept/index.php

INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

CAL FIRE's MEU Fire Safety Education Programs are conveyed through school programs, fair exhibits, posters, flyers, road signs, and thousands of other printed materials, radio and television spots, community meetings, one-on-one contacts with wildland homeowners, and in recent years, the Internet. This information and education is provided to people of all ages.

Smokey Bear, Sparky the Fire Dog, and Pluggie the fire hydrant are utilized at numerous events throughout the County with the goals of teaching fire safety at home and in the forest. Smokey, Sparky, and Pluggie are used in both the classroom setting and at public events, such as the Mendocino County Fair. While Smokey, Sparky, and Pluggie are used primarily for teaching young children, the MEU prevention staff also provides other informational and educational materials geared specifically to teacher and educators.

The objective of the Volunteers In Prevention (VIP) Program is to involve and utilize citizens along with public service groups in non-salaried positions to reduce human-caused fires. VIPs educate thousands of children and their parents about fire prevention by participating in fairs, parades, and staffing displays. Volunteers are trained to make preliminary wildland homeowner property inspections for fire safety as required by Public Resources Code 4291, and to discuss with homeowners ways to make their homes fire safe. These one-on-one contacts are an increasingly important education tool as the population in California's wildlands continues to grow. VIPs are trained to assist CAL FIRE's efforts during wildland fires and other emergencies by providing information to the media and public.

B. VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

The Vegetation Management Program (VMP) is a cost-sharing program utilizing prescribed fire, and mechanical means, for addressing wildland fire fuel hazards and other resource management issues on State Responsibility Area (SRA) lands. The use of prescribed fire mimics natural processes, restores fire to its historic role in wildland ecosystems, and provides significant fire hazard reduction benefits that enhance public and firefighter safety.

VMP allows private landowners to enter into a contract with CAL FIRE to use prescribed fire to accomplish a combination of fire protection and resource management goals. The projects which fit within MEU's priority areas (*e.g.* those identified through the Fire Plan) and are considered to be of most value to the unit are those that will be completed.

CAL FIRE administers several state and federal forestry assistance programs with the goal of reducing wildland fuel loads and improving the health and productivity of private forest lands. California's Forest Improvement Program (CFIP) and other federal programs that CAL FIRE administers, offer cost-share opportunities to assist individual landowners with land management planning, conservation practices to enhance wildlife habitat, and practices to enhance the productivity of the land. The Department also delivers the Forest Stewardship Program which combines funds from state and federal sources to assist communities with multiple-ownership watershed and community issues related to prefire fuels treatment, forest health, erosion control, and fisheries issues.